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2008: Apr.
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April 2008 \$5.00

Illinois Issues

A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

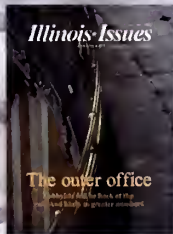
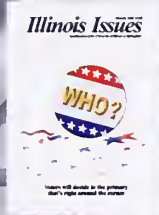
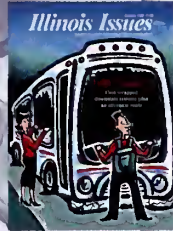


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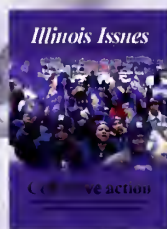
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Dana Hempel



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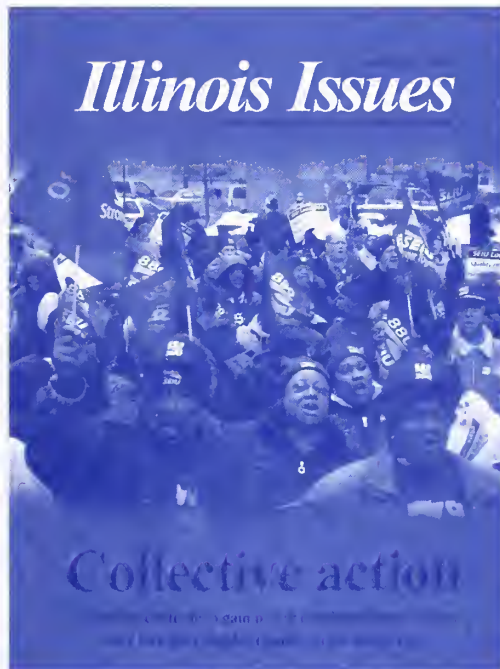
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I enrolled in a journalism news-writing class taught by Holly Arpan. A small, gravel-voiced taskmaster,

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Dana Heupel



A teacher's praise can shape a student's future

by Dana Heupel

Our editorial offices are in a flat-roofed, one-story building tucked away on the far east side of the campus of the University of Illinois at Springfield. Though one colleague described it as a “temporary 30-year-old structure,” it serves our needs just fine.

It also houses various other university departments, such as human resources, the campus ethics office, a survey research unit, the international students program, services for the disabled and a counseling center.

There also are three classrooms — as I found out soon after I began here. I shouted a greeting to a co-worker down a hallway and was met with a scowl and a slammed door by an instructor who was trying to teach a class.

Because our offices are surrounded mainly by support services, I had almost forgotten that the university's primary purpose is to educate students. That was reinforced a couple of weeks later in an e-mail University of Illinois President B. Joseph White sent to administrators on all campuses. He described a planning process to “deliver maximum resources to the academic front

What an incredible feeling it is when someone you respect tells you you're good at something.

lines” to ensure that the university supports its “core academic missions of teaching, research, service and economic development.”

White's mission and my misstep turned my thinking toward what a tremendous influence teachers can have on our future.

Longer ago than I want to believe, I was a student at Indiana University trying to figure out what to do with my life. I had always been good in math and science, but in step with the naive zeitgeist of the early 1970s, I equated those fields with the “military-industrial complex,” and by extension, the Vietnam War. I yearned for something more — as the catchphrase of the day went — “relevant.”

I enrolled in a journalism news-writing class taught by Holly Arpan. A small, gravel-voiced taskmaster,

she continually drilled us on precision and detail. I still recall one admonition that went something like, “Don't call it a vehicle, call it a car, or better yet a Ford, or better yet, a Ford Mustang, or better yet, a blue Ford Mustang convertible.”

(She also taught obituary style by instructing us to write our own death notices as if we had been killed in a car wreck traveling home for Thanksgiving break. I can tell you, there were several dozen very cautious young drivers on Indiana's highways that holiday weekend.)

One of my first offerings in her class wasn't news — or even at all relevant. It was an essay on autumn. After grading the papers, she handed them back to the rest of the students, but I didn't get mine. I figured I had totally botched it. But to my embarrassment, she read it aloud to my fellow aspiring wordsmiths and praised it for creativity and originality. I still have the essay, though looking at it now, her compliments were extremely kind.

But what an incredible feeling it is when someone you respect tells you you're good at something. I knew at

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that moment what career I would pursue.

Of course, the opposite is also probably true. A teacher who makes a thoughtless negative comment risks driving a student away from the subject he or she is trying to convey.

Holly Arpan's husband, Floyd, also taught journalism at the university. After completing Holly's course, I gravitated to Floyd's classes in magazine writing, and he was just as supportive and encouraging.

I always meant to thank them. I never did, and I don't know whether either is still alive. I've also always toyed around with writing a magazine article, or even a book, about what or who steered successful people onto their original career paths. My guess is that many of them would point to a teacher. But I never did that, either. Maybe this column will salve some of that guilt.

In people's minds, it seems as if perceptions about teachers have become wrapped together with all the ills of our public education system. Reports on 24-hour TV news channels focus on those who have abused their students. Employers complain that their new hires aren't properly prepared for the jobs ahead of them. And many schools have a difficult time recruiting quality instructors because many college students choose more lucrative careers.

Teachers themselves complain that their creativity is sometimes stifled because No Child Left Behind legislation forces them to teach for tests, not for students' enrichment. The hours are often long, the pay isn't great and in today's schools, the job sometimes can even be dangerous.

Granted, there are some teachers who are burned-out but still stand up in front of a class every day, simply going through the motions. But there still are some who can recognize a spark in a student and fan it until it grows into a full-blown flame. They and we need to

Granted, there are some teachers who are burned-out but still stand up in front of a class every day, simply going through the motions. But there still are some who can recognize a spark in a student and fan it until it grows into a full-blown flame.

remember that can happen, and when it does, it's magical.

Now, when I tiptoe past a classroom on campus, I sometimes glance in and silently hope that amid all of the chaos that goes along with directing a class full of distracted students, the teacher still realizes he or she has the power to change someone's life.

Please welcome another new member to the *Illinois Issues* staff. Tony Hamelin, our graduate assistant, joined us in March. He is pursuing a master's degree in environmental studies at UIS, after graduating last year from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Tony's originally from Wisconsin, and along with his "green" environmental pursuits, he's an avid Green Bay Packers football fan. That minor character flaw aside, he's doing a great job checking our facts and policing our grammar and spelling.

Also, please look at page 7 to read about our new effort to encourage comments on the *Illinois Issues* Blog. As always, we value our readers' opinions, and we're confident the online discussions will remain thoughtful and civil.

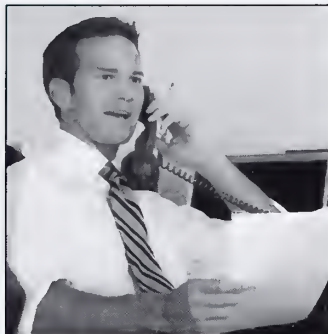
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A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

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Illinois Issues is published by Center Publications
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Editorial and business office: HRB 10, University of Illinois at Springfield, One University Plaza, Springfield, IL 62703-5407.

Telephone: 217-206-6084. Fax: 217-206-7257. E-mail: illinoisissues@uis.edu. E-mail editor: heupel.dana@uis.edu.

Subscription questions: *Illinois Issues*, Subscription Division, P.O. Box 2795, Springfield, IL 62708-2795 or call 1-800-508-0266.

Hours are 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday (except holidays). **Subscriptions:** \$39.95 one year/ \$72 two years/ \$105 three years; student rate is \$20 a year. Individual copy is \$5. Back issue is \$5. *Illinois Issues* is indexed in the PAIS Bulletin and is available electronically on our home page: <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>. *Illinois Issues* (ISSN 0738-9663) is published monthly, except July and August are combined. December is published online only. Periodical postage paid at Springfield, IL, and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Illinois Issues*, Subscription Division, P.O. Box 19243, Springfield, IL 62794-9243.

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Bethany Jaeger



The next push for early education funding could target children even earlier — at birth

by Bethany Jaeger

Illinois' nationally recognized Preschool for All program, which Gov. Rod Blagojevich launched in 2006, is set to expire this year. Lawmakers are sure to renew it, but only for another two years, despite support to make it permanent. That's the General Assembly's way to keep a short leash on the governor for fear of sending him a blank check.

"I think this got caught up in some of the trust issues between the legislature and the governor," says House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie, the Chicago Democrat sponsoring the two-year extension. "I'm sure at some point — I'm hopeful — that this will become a permanent program. But I think there's a sense that a short leash is not inappropriate."

The program is growing and producing results, but it can't keep up with demand.

Preschool for All, built on an existing program that started in the 1980s, offers state grants to local groups that provide preschool for children. Participation is voluntary. Grants first go to programs serving children who face disadvantages of language, cultural and economic barriers, which increase their risk of failing in school.

The state recently ranked first in the nation for offering preschool to 3-year-olds, enrolling 19 percent of them in Illinois, according to a report by the National Institute for Early Education at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Illinois ranked 12th for the percentage of 4-year-olds

But the General Assembly must decide whether a delayed payoff is worth the millions of state dollars already clouded by a gloomy economic outlook.

enrolled at 27 percent.

Since the 1980s, state preschool programs have served 190,000 children. The intent of Preschool for All is to expand availability to children from middle-income families to compete for grants. The final phase, provided there's enough money each year, is supposed to offer state-sponsored preschool to children from any income bracket.

In the past three years, the state has dedicated \$30 million, \$45 million and \$29 million to the program. But the money funded only about a third of the applications the State Board of Education received in the past two years.

Advocacy groups want even more — \$68 million — for the next fiscal year, which starts July 1. They say it would make up for the amount that wasn't available last year and help Illinois stay on track to offer preschool to children of more income levels.

But the advocacy groups' request also would allow the state to expand early

childhood education programs to even younger students — infants and toddlers.

The payoff, according to education advocates, is huge down the road, with higher-achieving students and law-abiding citizens, but the General Assembly must decide whether a delayed payoff is worth the millions of state dollars already clouded by a gloomy economic outlook.

Sen. Kimberly Lightford, a Maywood Democrat, wants to make the preschool program permanent and eventually offer all-day kindergarten. She says Illinois can create a flow from preschool to college, the mission of the Illinois P-20 Council that was created last year.

"We've got to recognize the fact that if children are coming to kindergarten not prepared, meaning they don't know ABCs, they don't know numbers and colors, they're already behind the curve," Lightford says. "So when they get to that third-grade level of testing, they're behind at a first-grade level. And we're surprised. We shouldn't be."

But the state can't keep up with the demand for preschool programs, let alone programs to reach parents with infants and toddlers.

According to the state board, Illinois funded 78 preschool programs across the state this fiscal year, but that's far short of the 232 that applied for grants. The year before, the agency funded 101 of the 310 proposals for preschool programs.

That's a much better percentage than

We're now accepting comments on Illinois Issues Blog

Go ahead. Throw in your two cents. *Illinois Issues* magazine, with the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Springfield, now accepts comments on the Illinois Issues Blog.

Our Statehouse bureau has blogged since spring 2006. After two years, we're still learning and experimenting with ways the blog can augment *Illinois Issues* magazine and the Web site — <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>.

But we realize that what sets the blog apart is its ability to allow author and reader to interact in real time.

In the book, *blog! how the newest media revolution is changing politics*,

business, and culture, journalists David Kline and Dan Burstein say the intrinsic value of blogs overshadows the overabundance of trivial subjects:

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Go ahead. Comment. We're eager to hear from you.

prevention programs aimed at parents with infants and toddlers. The state funded six of the 146 proposed programs during the current fiscal year and 15 of 182 last fiscal year.

"We're not coming even close to meeting the demand," says Kay Henderson, the state education board's division administrator for early childhood. "To translate that into dollars and cents, we had almost \$23 million worth of requests for birth-to-3 programs, and we funded \$1.6 million of those. There's quite a difference there."

Lawmakers and education advocates may push next to increase funding for the birth-to-3 programs. But that would require a change in state law, which currently limits the Illinois State Board of Education to spending no more than 11 percent of all funds dedicated to Early Childhood Education on the birth-to-3 programs.

Policymakers and researchers have always recognized programs for birth to 3 as important, particularly because they serve as a way for parents to spend critical time with their children from Day 1, says Diana Rauner, executive director of the Chicago-based advocacy group called the Ounce of Prevention Fund. The organization's president, Harriet Meyer, also co-chairs the Illinois Early Learning Council, which Blagojevich formed by law to study and make recommendations that helped create Preschool for All.

With the help of the council, Rauner says lawmakers now have more evidence-based research to support their decisions about early childhood education funding.

For instance, studies show that programs aimed at parents with infants and toddlers help the children in brain development and behavioral skills, including perseverance and self-control. Those skills serve them well in preschool.

If children don't develop the intellectual and behavioral skills early enough, they can suffer from a "bottleneck," according to a 2006 study by two University of Chicago scientists, Flavio Cunha and James Heckman. That means they have a hard time learning later on.

"In many cases, a 3- to 5-year-old who is a little bit behind their fellow classmates falls further and further behind throughout their school years," says Sean Noble, director of government relations for Voices for Illinois Children, a privately funded statewide network of advocates based in Chicago. "The flip side of that is that if they have high quality early childhood experience before they get to kindergarten, studies show that the opposite can happen."

A Michigan study followed at-risk children from preschool to age 40, starting in the 1960s. The ones who attended preschool had higher grades and were more likely to graduate from high school than their at-risk counterparts. They spent less time in special education, and they

were less dependent on welfare as adults. There was substantially less crime.

Results also are positive in Illinois. According to the State Board of Education's June 2007 report, children identified as at-risk for academic failure rated above average in skills needed to enter kindergarten, as well as in reading, math and language skills in elementary school. Results include data since the 1986 program, but numbers are expected to improve as more children attend state-sponsored preschool through Blagojevich's expansion.

While lawmakers tend to agree with the concept and understand the importance of investing early in children, they also need political will to vote for something that costs now and pays off later — particularly when economists project a \$750 million state budget deficit this year and decreased revenues next year.

Rauner says lawmakers don't have to wait long to see results or to realize cost savings.

"The services that these programs are providing are targeted at the population of children that makes up the vast majority of the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system and the criminal justice system. Those, of course, are enormous societal costs. To the extent that we can prevent problems from happening, we are investing our dollars wisely." □

Bethany Jaeger can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

NIU SHOOTINGS Does time heal?

“Time heals wounds, not bulldozers.”

— A response to the *Chicago Tribune*’s request for commentary on whether Cole Hall, the scene of the February 14 murder of five students at Northern Illinois University, should be demolished.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich appeared on the DeKalb campus two weeks after the shootings, which injured an additional 16 people and left the shooter dead. He announced that he would spearhead a legislative push to build a new \$40 million lecture hall in memory of the five who died.

“Cole Hall will be torn down, but what happened there will never be forgotten,” Blagojevich said, announcing that the new building would be called Memorial Hall and would include a third lecture hall and additional classrooms.

But like the *Tribune* reader, the state lawmakers who will have to approve such a building aren’t so sure Blagojevich has the right idea. And NIU President John Peters has backed away from his initial support of the Blagojevich plan, saying he has since heard many conflicting views. A confidential e-mail box has been established on campus to sort out public opinion at NIU about what an appropriate memorial would be. “Once consensus is reached, it will be up to the NIU family to communicate our needs to our state leaders,” Peters wrote in an e-mail to campus.

Senate President Emil Jones Jr. also backed away from his call for demolition once he learned the NIU administration had done so, too. “We were looking to NIU for their decision,” spokeswoman Cindy Davidsmeyer says.



Northern Illinois University students listen to Gov. Rod Blagojevich’s plan to tear down Cole Hall, which is pictured in the background. The new building would be called Memorial Hall.

Sen. Bradley Burzynski, a Clare Republican whose district includes DeKalb, says in his 17 years in office, he has never received as many calls and letters about an issue as he has on whether to raze Cole Hall, and (as of early March) not one was in favor of tearing down the building. He says he may introduce legislation related to the building at NIU as time passes, but “as for a \$40 million proposal, I won’t be introducing that.”

Burzynski says, “Now that the governor’s had his press pop on this, let’s see what realistically can be done.”

One Republican lawmaker was quick to denounce Blagojevich’s plan. “I think to simply helicopter into the DeKalb campus and announce that we’re going to tear this building down and replace it was

a premature and an emotional decision that wasn’t properly thought out and is not a good public policy in a time when we can’t pay for so many other needs around the state,” says Rep. Dave Winters of Shirland.

“Once you take it down, you have to rebuild it, and all of the construction cost is, to me, wasted. I’d rather spend \$3 million on that building and reserve another \$37 million that can be used by that campus or some other campus or for a different purpose completely,” Winters says.

“I don’t think he’d thought it through. It was almost pandering to the crowd. Students are very upset right now. The parents are upset. The faculty is upset. But let’s let the heat of the moment die.”

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

The Illinois General Assembly is in full swing debating Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposed budget for the next fiscal year, which starts July 1. Lawmakers have until May 31, the constitutional deadline, to approve a budget with a simple majority of votes. In the meantime, they also are considering a variety of substantive measures, some of which react to laws enacted last year.



Moment of silence

The state's controversial moment of silence requirement for schools was dealt a blow when the House easily approved a new version reversing the requirement. Sponsored by Chicago Democratic Rep. John Fritchey, the measure's fate in the Senate is less certain.



Smoking ban

Multiple lawmakers are trying to weaken or overturn the state's smoking ban that went into effect January 1. Two attempts have been rejected so far.

One exemption made it to the House floor. Rep. Paul Froehlich, a Schaumburg Democrat, sponsors the measure that would allow smoking in hookah lounges and tobacco stores that make at least 80 percent of their revenue from smoking supplies and tobacco products.

Another proposal by Onarga Republican Rep. Shane Cultra would repeal the law altogether, but a House committee rejected it.

Rep. Harry Ramey, a West Chicago Republican, proposes that businesses that wish to opt out of the smoking ban be allowed to apply for licenses to allow smoking.



Health care expansion

The governor's first-term program All Kids, which provides state-sponsored health insurance for children regardless of income, would expand to young adults up to age 25 under a measure sponsored by Democratic Rep. Fred Crespo of Hoffman Estates. The measure also would prohibit

the exclusion of a child from insurance coverage if he or she is adopted or doesn't live with the person who's insured. The administration tried to expand the All Kids program without legislative approval but was blocked by a rulemaking body. Crespo's measure returns the debate to the legislative arena.

Children of undocumented immigrants would no longer be eligible for Gov. Rod Blagojevich's All Kids health insurance program under a measure sponsored by Sen. Carole Pankau, a Roselle Republican. Exceptions would be made for prenatal and emergency services. To prevent fraud, Pankau also has a measure that would require anyone applying for the program to verify income by providing two recent pay stubs.



Photo ID for voters

Anyone seeking to vote in person on Election Day would have to present a government-issued photo identification card to election judges under a measure proposed by Rep. David Reis, a Willow Hill Republican. The Illinois State Board of Elections is required to issue a photo ID card to each registered voter who can't afford to obtain another government-issued photo ID. Not having a valid ID would not stop voters from being allowed to cast a provisional ballot.



Tax "swap"

Two plans to fundamentally alter the way Illinois funds public education have rekindled debate about increasing income taxes. Both measures aim to pump more money into education through increases in state income tax rates and decreases in local property taxes.

The House measure, sponsored by Rep. David Miller, a Lynwood Democrat, would increase education funding and reform the public employee pension system. A similar measure stalled last year.

The Senate plan, sponsored by Sen. James Meeks, a Chicago Democrat, would provide money for education and capital needs across the state without a

focus on pensions. He toyed with the idea of running for governor on a similar platform last year.

A third proposal would increase the state's income tax rate for individuals from 3 percent to 4 percent. It's sponsored by Rep. Annazette Collins, a Chicago Democrat. The personal income tax has not increased since Gov. Jim Edgar's administration in the 1990s.



Medicaid payments

Cash-strapped hospitals would receive their final infusion of Medicaid reimbursements from a federal program if the governor signs a measure on his desk. The plan provides \$1.2 billion in funds for rural hospitals and other providers that care primarily for Medicaid patients. The program is in its third and final year, but Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg, an Evanston Democrat, says he intends to draft a new plan that would need state and federal approval.



Education board

The governor's power to appoint members to the Illinois State Board of Education would be limited under a measure sponsored by Rep. Lou Lang, a Skokie Democrat. The plan would allow a nomination board to form a pool of 27 candidates for state board positions, and the governor could appoint members from that list.



Member initiatives

Projects in each legislator's district would be easier to identify in the state budget under a measure proposed by Aurora Republican Rep. Patricia Reid Lindner. The House approved the measure. Each separate line item in the budget would fully describe the project. No legislative member initiative, sometimes labeled "pork," could be funded through a lump sum amount, which makes it difficult to track in the state's mammoth budget.

More checklist**Gun control**

All assault weapons would be banned statewide under a proposal by Rep. Edward Acevedo, a Chicago Democrat. The sale, transport and manufacturing of semi-automatic weapons, including machine guns, would be illegal.

Chicago Democratic Rep. Greg Harris proposes revoking Firearm Owner's Identification Cards of parents whose children get ahold of their legally possessed guns, even if the children didn't commit a crime with the guns. The measure would apply only to children with a history of mental disorders and threatening behavior.

**Con Con**

On November 4, Illinois citizens will be asked to vote on whether the state should convene another constitutional convention, opening the door for elected delegates to rewrite the state charter. By law, the question must appear on the ballot every 20 years. Lawmakers agreed last month to form a special committee of legislators to explain the ballot question and to document arguments for and against a convention. The report to the General Assembly is expected this month.

**Energy drinks**

Energy drinks containing alcohol would need clearer labeling, perhaps a sticker, in an effort to prevent minors from buying them or disguising them from adults. Beverage companies, which oppose the legislation, also would be prohibited from marketing the drinks in a way that would attract minors.

Patrick O'Brien

STATE BUDGET

Governor's proposal

Gov. Rod Blagojevich proposed his version of a state budget in February, giving the General Assembly a few months to debate the ideas before the next fiscal year starts July 1.

While legislators agree on some of the goals — stimulate the economy, pay off state debt and finance a major infrastructure program — they drastically differ on how to accomplish them.

The governor remains focused on benefiting the middle class, this time with a one-time tax credit for families and businesses to help stimulate the economy, in addition to expanded health care.

Here is an ongoing list of programs that will be subject to debate this spring:

Household tax rebates \$300 tax credit per child for residents who qualify for the federal tax break. *Funding source:* "Securitization" of state assets, or selling an existing revenue source to investors for a one-time influx of cash. The example provided by the administration is to get an up-front payment from investors who buy the state's portion of national tobacco settlement funds, which are likely to generate less money for the state in coming years because of fewer smokers and effects of the statewide smoking ban.

Business tax credits \$300 million in tax breaks — amounting to a 20 percent break — for businesses that filed corporate income taxes in Illinois for 2007 and that maintained their employment levels. *Funding source:* Partially paid by "securitization" of decreasing revenue sources.

Expanded health care \$417 million "Illinois Covered" plan that would provide state-sponsored health insurance to adults. *Funding source:* 3 percent payroll tax on businesses that have more than 10 employees but don't provide comprehensive health benefits to them (this mirrors his proposal last year, which stalled).

Statewide infrastructure \$25 billion capital plan for roads, bridges, schools and other construction projects. The governor recruited former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, a Republican, and Southern Illinois University President Glenn Poshard, a Democrat, to lobby state legislators to support a capital plan. *Funding source:* Selling 80 percent of the Illinois Lottery and issuing \$3.8 billion in bonds. The debt service would come from annual transfers from the Road Fund.

Public employee pensions \$16 billion for pension obligation bonds to pay down pensions and to save money from a lower interest rate. *Funding source:* Partially selling the Illinois Lottery and transferring \$300 million each year from the Road Fund and other special funds.

Education \$300 million increase, which advocates say is a drop in the bucket and fails to address the systemic problem of an inequitable funding formula that relies on local property taxes. Education funding is a priority for Senate President Emil Jones Jr. and a politically important topic during an election year.

Lawmakers also are considering different ways to raise money, including increasing the income tax to reform education funding and to finance a major capital program.

They're also still considering last year's proposal to build new casinos or riverboats to fund the public works program.

Republican plan

House Republicans also want to offer their own version of \$40 million in tax breaks to spur the economy. Building on the federal tax rebate checks expected to arrive in mailboxes this spring, they propose suspending the state sales tax on items valued up to \$600 during Memorial Day weekend, May 23 to May 26. Rep. Sidney Mathias, a Buffalo Grove Republican, says the sales tax holiday would create an incentive to spend the federal rebate checks on goods rather than on debt, which doesn't stimulate the sagging economy.

Bethany Jaeger



Students at the Washington Park campus of the Chicago International Charter School gather for a visit by Olympic athletes.

OLYMPIAN EFFORT

Four major Chicago-based foundations have bolstered the city's bid to host the 2016 Olympics with a multimillion-dollar fund that will start handing out grants this month.

The effort, which was announced in February, is targeted at boosting communities that would be home to game venues. The foundations expect neighborhood improvements to occur, though it won't be known until 2009 whether Chicago will be the host city.

The Chicago Community Trust, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the McCormick Tribune Foundation are each donating \$1 million dollars, while the Polk Bros. Foundation will donate \$500,000. The foundations expect to raise a total of \$5 million to \$8 million.

Funding will be aimed toward city and community planning, education, employment and training services, affordable hous-

ing, research and business, commercial and retail development in communities where Olympic venues would be located, says Julia Stasch, vice president of the program on human and community development for the MacArthur Foundation. Residents of those neighborhoods and others throughout the city should prepare for job openings in such areas as hospitality, security and construction, Stasch says.

Communities to be potentially affected include Englewood, Grand Boulevard, Kenwood and Woodlawn on the south side and East Garfield Park, Little Village, Near West Side, North Lawndale, Pilsen and South Lawndale on the west side. Washington Park on the south side and Douglas Park on the north side are named as potential venues.

It was announced in April 2007 that the United States Olympic Committee had selected Chicago as the U.S. bid city for the 2016 Games. In its Olympic bid,

Chicago is competing with cities in Azerbaijan, Brazil, the Czech Republic, Japan, Qatar and Spain.

The final decision on which international city will host the 2016 Games will be made in 2009.

"It would propel Chicago into a rarefied echelon of cities that have hosted the Olympics that will forever be part of its legacy like the Columbian Exposition in 1893, the World's Fair," says Terry Mazany, president of The Chicago Community Trust.

"I realize for the next 18 months, the outcome is uncertain, and at the same time, because there is real planning and real impact on the neighborhoods, it's important we are providing support for those efforts right now. I think the excitement and the intensity and the elevation of this among our priorities shift dramatically at the point that Chicago would be awarded the status of host city."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

ENVIRONMENT

University field station set to open to the public

Photographs courtesy of L. Michael Purnell

The Emiquon Field Station, which sits on a bluff overlooking the Illinois River north of Havana, is scheduled to have a ribbon-cutting ceremony later this month. A research arm of the University of Illinois at Springfield, the station was developed in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy, which owns the 7,100-acre nature preserve. University researchers and students will use the state-of-the-art facility to monitor the changes taking place as the area transforms from dairy and crop farming to a natural state (see *Illinois Issues*, July/August 2006, page 17; January 2007, page 31). The field station will also be a link to scientists and activities at the nearby state-owned Dickson Mounds Museum.

"We're planning a public open house on April 26," says Michael Lemke, associate professor of biology and director of the station. That will include tours of the building, talks by Dickson Mounds and Nature Conservancy partners and a walking tour of some of the restored ecology. A ribbon-cutting ceremony for invited guests and dignitaries will be held the day before.

A science meeting, which Lemke wants to establish as a regular event, is set for April 3. It brings together scientists who share their knowledge and research about the restoration being done at Emiquon. It also offers an opportunity for the university community to network with government agencies and private organizations that have invested in the project.

"We hope this will grow into an annual event with national and international speakers, and we can start distilling more of the science of ecology restoration," says Lemke.

The field station could act as a magnet for the U of I's Springfield campus to draw more science students. Lemke says it's too early to tell what impact there will be on recruiting good students, but the field station has already been a factor in the decision of two new faculty members to choose UIS.

He wants to reach out to more high school and community college students through such activities as this spring's molecular bio-blitz that looks at biodiversity at the microscopic level.



Emiquon Field Station

The field station, says Harry Berman, provost for the Springfield campus, gives the university a physical presence "in this great location." He sees it as an opportunity to recruit more faculty and students — and attract more federal funding dollars — to do research in a number of disciplines: Biology, chemistry and environmental science are the obvious ones linked to restoration ecology. But with the close proximity to Dickson Mounds and the research in early Native Americans who lived on that land, he and Lemke also

envision expanded research in archaeology, history and English.

This is a "world-class" project, Berman says, referring to The Nature Conservancy's floodplain restoration in Fulton County, the largest being tackled anywhere in the Midwest. "There is so much to learn about the biology, so much research to do, and that's why we want to be present right in the middle of this place, where this amazing undertaking is happening."

Beverly Scobell

Science survey switch

The 150-year-old Natural History Survey is preparing for major change. It's the primary research body for information about the state's ecology, wetlands, fish, wildlife, insects and other biological resources. The Natural History Survey, the Geological Survey, Water Survey and Waste Management and Resources Center are expected to transition from under jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

State funding is supposed to follow, according to Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration.

The governor announced the idea during his annual budget address in February, but it's been explored for decades. The university says the surveys will form the new Institute for Natural Sciences and Sustainability.

The change, which may need legislative approval and approval of the university administration, would have to be complete by July 1, the start of the new fiscal year.

The surveys already are physically housed on the university campus, and researchers collaborate with faculty on projects.

"The truth is that the change, as I foresee it, is going to be primarily affecting administrators and how we deal with budgets and personnel issues," says Bill Ruesink, interim chief of the Natural History Survey until the new chief, Brian Anderson, starts May 1 (see page 34). "And it really should have very minimal impact on programs."

State Rep. Chapin Rose, a Mahomet Republican, says he's concerned about the impact on the survey employees, whom he represents.

"I think everybody's anticipating a happy marriage," he says. "What I'm concerned about is the prenuptial agreement."

Rose says negotiations between the state and the university need to determine whether survey employees maintain seniority and pay grade when they transfer to the university's payroll. They already are included in the university retirement benefit system.

Rose says he's also concerned about the timing. Given that legislators are in the thick of budget negotiations this month and next, he says the university needs to make public plans and recommendations so legislators can consider the terms of the transition before voting on a final state budget.

The good news, he says, is that the surveys may be more secure under the university's wing than under the state's.

That's because state funding for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources is expected to decrease. The governor proposes making the department more "self-sufficient," says Kelley Quinn, spokeswoman for his budget office.

Pending legislative approval, the agency's budget would increase from nearly 70 percent to more than 80 percent funded by sources other than the state's general revenue. Other sources include increased fees for services.

Rep. Gary Hannig, a Litchfield Democrat and chief budget negotiator, says while he hasn't heard opposition to the idea of moving the surveys, state funding for universities is dwindling, too. It's been flat for a handful of years.

"The governor would see this as then becoming part of the overall University of Illinois budget," Hannig says, "so next year if he comes in and says, 'Look, we're going to hold the universities flat,' then it's up to the University of Illinois to figure out how to fund [the surveys] and anything above and beyond what they have today."

Melanie Loots, associate vice chancellor for research at the university, says the move could mutually benefit the surveys and the state, which could reduce head count to save money at the state agency. Safeguards for future funding, however, are fluid.

"At this point, nothing is in place," Loots says. "Perhaps some of that would depend on, 'What is the implementing legislation for this actually going to be?'"

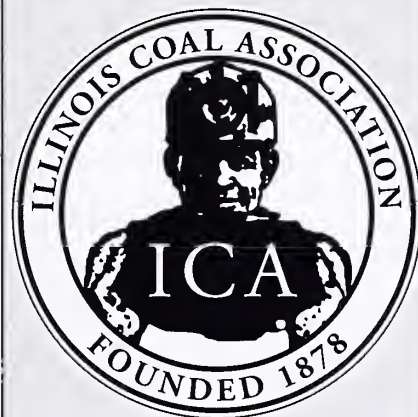
Bethany Jaeger

Pew gives Illinois a C

Illinois was among the poorest-scoring states in a rating project by the Pew Center on the States, drawing a C.

While several states fell in the C category, only New Hampshire and Rhode Island scored lower in Pew's report, *Grading the States 2008*.

Pew judged the states on several categories. In its report on Illinois, the Washington, D.C.-based foundation cited as weaknesses long-term financial outlook, budget process and structural balance under the money category. In the people category, training and development and managing employee performance were among weaknesses cited. Under the infrastructure category, the state was dinged for capital planning and maintenance.



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Phillip M. Gonet, President

Museum move sparks disputes

The Chicago Children's Museum has had plans to move from Navy Pier to a new \$100 million facility at the lakefront's Grant Park since 2006, but resistance to the idea has mounted.

A preservation group that usually focuses its efforts on saving endangered buildings has joined neighbors who are concerned about parking, the two major Chicago newspapers and the local alderman in voicing opposition. Brendan Reilly, the 42nd Ward alderman, has a list of two dozen alternative sites. But the plan has the backing of Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. Spokesmen for Daley did not return repeated phone calls from *Illinois Issues*.

"The mission of Chicago Children's Museum is to create a community where play and learning connect," says Jennifer Farrington, chief executive officer and president of the museum. "And our primary aim in moving the museum is to be able to position the museum at the center of the city and give maximum access to all of Chicago's children and families, as well as build a world-class, green, universally accessible building that will be an extraordinary symbol of what children mean to the city of Chicago."

Building the museum at the park would put it near Millennium Park and The Chicago Art Institute and make it easily accessible to public transportation, Farrington says.



Grant Park

"The issue is that Grant Park is not an appropriate location for a 100,000-square-foot children's museum," says Jonathan Fine, president of the organization Preservation Chicago, which put Grant Park on its list of seven most endangered historical places because of the plans for the museum.

Fine says of the mayor, "He may prevail on this but not without a fight."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

ERA, again

The Equal Rights Amendment was the subject of bloodletting in the Capitol rotunda in the 1970s. The debate to end all forms of discrimination based on gender rekindled in the Illinois General Assembly last month.

Democratic Rep. Lou Lang of Skokie proposes a measure to allow Illinois to ratify an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Thirty-eight of 50 states must ratify a change to the Constitution.

"I want to make Illinois the 36th state in the country to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, and I think we can do it," Lang says.

This year's debate isn't as fired up as it was in the 1970s, when enthusiastic supporters used pig's blood to smear the names of opposing legislators on the Capitol grounds.

Since the 1970s, the proposal to ratify the amendment has advanced but always failed to gain the three-fifths votes necessary in both chambers. The House approved it in 2003, but it never came up in the Senate. Last month, the proposal squeaked through a House committee on partisan lines.

Opponents say the effort needs to start from scratch because the last deadline Congress issued for ratification was in 1982. Proponents say that hasn't stopped Congress before. They cite the 27th Amendment concerning congressional pay raises that originally was proposed in 1789 but wasn't ratified by enough states until 1992. Both sides of the ERA debate argue whether a deadline can be imposed for ratification.

Phyllis Schlafly, president of the conservative activist group Eagle Forum, led the successful charge in the past to oppose the amendment in Illinois.

"The ERA was declared dead by the Supreme Court," she says. "What they're trying to do now is very foolish."

Measuring the practical effects of the amendment is difficult.

Schlafly and state Rep. David Reis, a Willow Hill Republican, say the law would negatively affect society, referring to comments that imply the law would force women into combat, require unisex bathrooms and guarantee taxpayer-funded abortions.

Reis adds that the state already offers protections for women, and if women are being discriminated against, then it can be addressed by specific legislation instead of a sweeping constitutional amendment.

"It came up in debate that women can't get loans without male cosigners," he says. "Well that's a bunch of baloney. We have laws that protect women."

Rev. Marilyn Robb, a United Methodist minister and feminist who had "ERA 100" on her license plate in the 1970s, says arguments against women's rights were versed in religion, with God prescribing woman's role as homemaker.

Glenview Republican Rep. Elizabeth Coulson says the opposition is perplexing. "I do not understand anyone who has daughters, granddaughters, wives, mothers, who would think they shouldn't have equal rights."

Schlafly, after 35 years of fighting the amendment, doesn't see what all of the fuss is about. "Women are the most fortunate creatures on the face of the earth," she says.

Patrick O'Brien

Passing the buck

A state tuition program for veterans that Illinois House members say already is underfunded by at least \$20 million, will receive no extra money next year, according to the Illinois Board of Higher Education. That makes six consecutive years without an increase for the program, leaving universities to foot the rest of the bill.

Schools that already suffer from years of reduced state funding are being forced to bear the cost of an unfunded mandate, says Rep. David Miller, a Lynwood Democrat and chairman of the House Appropriations for Higher Education Committee. That results in higher tuition rates for students as schools try to cover the costs of educating veterans, according to testimony at the committee.

A state grant pays for tuition and certain fees at Illinois schools for men and women who have been on active military duty for at least a year. Schools provide waivers for the veterans to attend, and the state reimburses the institutions. The problem is that the grant money often runs out, forcing universities to make up the difference.

The estimated cost of the program is a combined \$40 million, but state universities face a \$22 million shortfall, according to Miller. The program's costs have more than doubled in five years.

"Instead of being a taxpayer issue, it's become a user tax on students," he says.

The Board of Higher Education reports that the program, the Illinois Veterans Tuition Grant, was budgeted at a little more than \$19 million this fiscal year. State schools have received \$18 million so far, according to the board.

Meanwhile, the number of veterans returning from active duty continues to increase and could grow faster if the next presidential administration withdraws troops from Iraq. The Illinois Student Assistance Commission reports that the deficit has been a problem since at least 2004, when the state was \$5 million short on payments for the grant.

University of Illinois President B. Joseph White testified to the committee that a lack of state funding will cost the school \$4 million this year, even after state money is figured in. Illinois State University President Al Bowman said his school lost \$600,000 in tuition that the state didn't reimburse in 2007, and that number will increase to \$1 million this year.

One university administrator laid the responsibility at the feet of Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

"It's the law, but the governor was supposed to provide funding," says Cheryl Peck, spokeswoman for the University of Illinois at Springfield. Peck adds that the university took \$490,000 from other areas of the budget this year to ensure that veterans' tuitions are covered.

The governor's proposed state budget for the next fiscal year, which starts July 1, maintains flat funding for higher education.

Flat funding actually decreases the universities' income, according to Rep. Rich Brauer, a Petersburg Republican. He says the 3 percent to 4 percent increase in costs related to inflation gives schools less money with which to work, and most state universities already receive less money than they did in 2002.

Patrick O'Brien

Rezko trial gets under way

The federal corruption trial of political fundraiser Antoin "Tony" Rezko began March 3 in Chicago, casting shadows over both U.S. Sen. Barack Obama's presidential campaign and Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration.

Rezko a Chicago real estate developer and top Democratic fundraiser, was a key member of Blagojevich's "kitchen cabinet," the cadre of friends and unofficial advisers who made suggestions on state board appointments. Prosecutors allege Rezko used that clout to squeeze fees and bribes out of the state's teacher pension investment and hospital construction systems. He faces federal charges of attempted extortion, money laundering, fraud and aiding and abetting bribery.

Blagojevich hasn't been charged. But he has been identified as "Public Official A," the unnamed politician who, according to the government's case, allegedly said he could steer state contracts in exchange for political contributions. Blagojevich continues to deny any involvement.

Obama isn't involved in the case, but his long ties to Rezko — encompassing friendship, fundraising and a real estate transaction related to Obama's Chicago home — has dogged his presidential bid.

In the trial's opening arguments, Assistant U.S. Attorney Carrie E. Hamilton started by boiling the case down to a simple narrative:

"Every day across this state, thousands of public school teachers go to work," she told the 12 jurors. "Some day, these teachers will retire." When they do, Hamilton continued, they will rely on a teacher pension system that is one of several state functions allegedly tainted by Rezko's clout within Blagojevich's administration.

The government alleges that Rezko, working with state government insider Stuart Levine and others, squeezed fees out of investment firms seeking to do business with the state Teachers' Retirement System, then nudged the system's board toward approving those contracts.

In one case, an investment firm allegedly was told to either pay them a \$2 million fee for the contract or agree to raise \$1.5 million for "Public Official A." Blagojevich isn't alleged to have been involved in that conversation.

Rezko also is accused of a scheme to get a hospital construction proposal approved by the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board, of which Levine was a member, in exchange for a bribe from the builder.

Rezko defense attorney Joseph Duffy portrayed Levine as a corrupt insider who is lying about Rezko's involvement in order to save himself.

Kevin McDermott

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Bridge agreement forged

Illinois and Missouri's governors recently agreed to a \$640 million plan to build a new bridge over the Mississippi River from East St. Louis to St. Louis. The bridge is expected to ease congestion on the existing Poplar Street Bridge. The new bridge, which is to begin construction in 2010, will be a mile north of the Martin Luther King Bridge on St. Louis' north side.

A major hangup had been Missouri's desire to have a toll bridge. Illinois was opposed, and the two sides faced losing \$239 million in federal dollars earmarked for the project, says

state Rep. Jay Hoffman, a Collinsville Democrat. "Missouri was really pushing for tolls, and that would have put an extraordinary burden on our people. That's why we're totally against tolls."

Illinois will spend about \$313 million, which includes \$49 million from capital funds that must still be raised, and Missouri will put up \$88 million. The remaining funds would need to come from the \$239 federal earmark. The project could take four to six years.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Medicaid matters

Illinois doctors say diminishing returns on state reimbursements for Medicaid patients may force them out of business.

A proposal to increase Medicaid payments to doctors would cost Illinois at least \$300 million a year, according to Senate committee testimony. The measure attempts to increase the rate at which the state reimburses doctors at a time when existing state payments already are delayed to doctors, pharmacists and other health care providers.

The increased reimbursements weren't met with the warmest reaction from some lawmakers.

Sen. Susan Garrett, a Lake Forest Democrat, said in committee that the measure won't help pay doctors more as the state struggles to match sagging revenues with increasing demand for health care services. "If there's no money here to make the payments, even though we owe more money, all we're going to do to keep up with payments is to slow down the process," she said.

Dr. Rodney Osborn, president of the Illinois State Medical Society, testified that patient access to care is threatened as doctors weigh the possibility of being forced to stop accepting Medicaid patients.

"While as physicians we're strongly committed to serving those in need, we cannot continue to do so when our practice expenses increase far more rapidly than Medicaid reimbursement," he said.

Sen. Dale Righter, a Mattoon Republican, said the state already is attempting to expand state-sponsored health care faster than it can afford to, given the state's budget deficit. He cited an estimate by Illinois' bipartisan Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability that projects a \$750 million deficit for the current fiscal year.

The increased Medicaid reimbursements, if enacted, could absorb all projected new revenue, according to supporters and opponents of the measure.

Patrick O'Brien

Views on juvenile justice reported

Two separate surveys indicate support for rehabilitation of juvenile offenders and a willingness to fund such efforts.

The surveys were funded last year by the Chicago-based John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. One survey conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Children's Law and Policy looked at youth crime and race and found greater-than-expected support for programs aimed at remedial treatment for juvenile offenders, says Mark Soler, executive director of the center. Soler says a high level of support was expected, but what his group found was a "very high level of support."

The importance of the finding, Soler says, is that when members of legislatures are asked to back juvenile rehabilitation programs, they are more likely to be open to the idea knowing that public support exists. Center researchers polled 300 people in four states — Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania and Washington — where MacArthur has focused reform efforts under a program called Model for Change.

The survey found that 89 percent of the respondents said "almost all youth who commit crimes have the potential to change." Meanwhile, fewer than 15 percent saw incarceration as a very effective method to rehabilitate youth offenders.

The other survey, conducted by the John Jay College of

Criminal Justice in New York and the Department of Psychology at Temple University in Philadelphia, looked at 500 respondents' willingness to pay for rehabilitation.

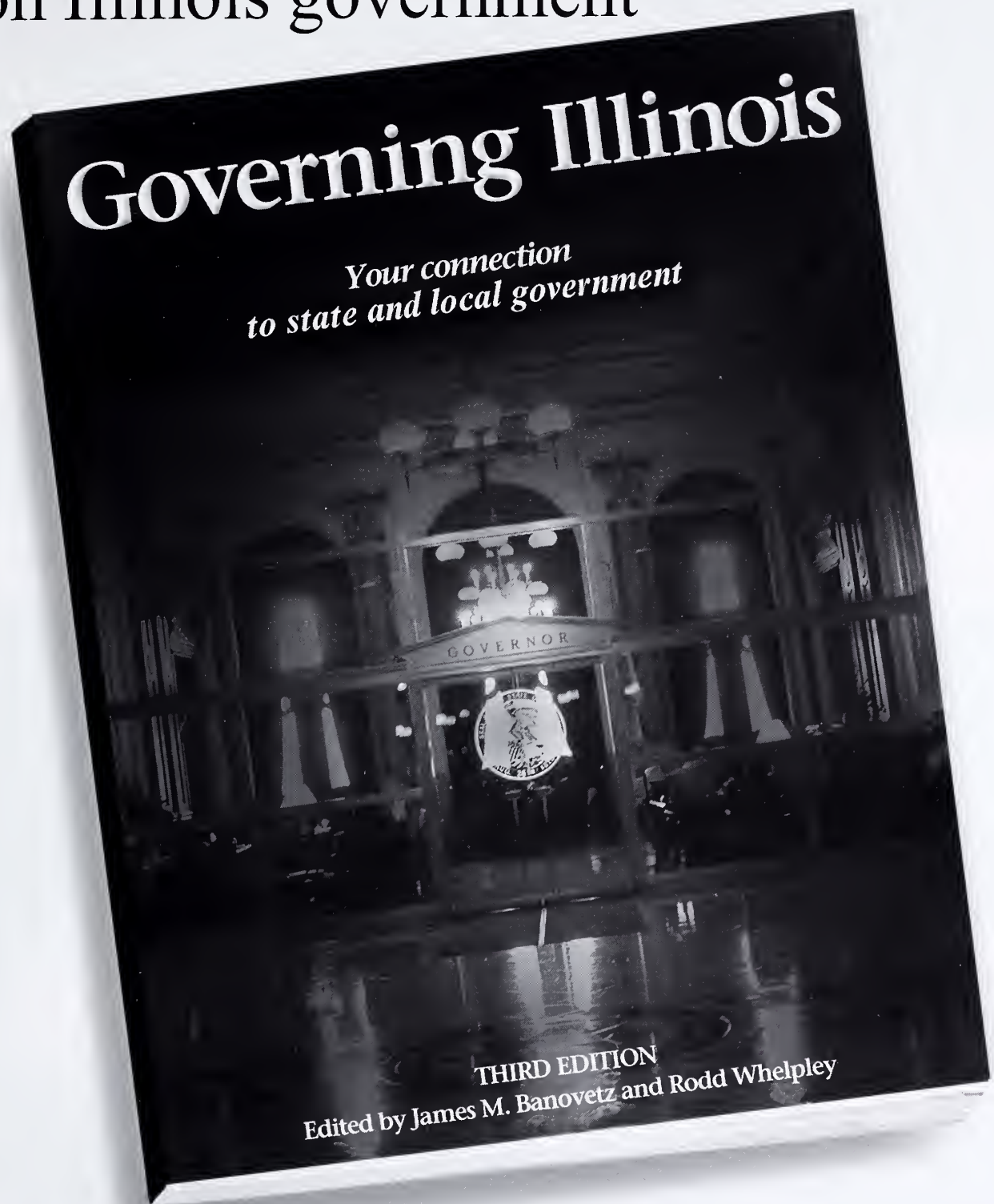
"People were more likely to spend tax dollars on rehabilitation programs for serious youth offenders" in the four Model for Change states, says Alex Piquero, co-author of the study and a John Jay professor.

"What that means is there is a perception that people are punishment-oriented and punishment-happy because policy-makers are more likely to institute policies that are friendly or more in favor of those policies that punish juvenile offenders," Piquero says. "Our research found that not only is it cheaper to implement rehabilitation-oriented strategies, they are more effective."

"Momentum is gathering across the nation to replace harsh, ineffective measures with programs that address the welfare of young people while preserving safe communities," said MacArthur president Jonathan Fanton at a conference on juvenile justice reform. "The public understands that youth in trouble with the law are not lost, and that working with them to solve problems is a better approach to public safety than just locking them up."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

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Immigrant friendly

On immigration, Illinois is at the forefront
in bucking a national trend

by Daniel C. Vock

Illinois lawmakers took on the federal government over its handling of immigration enforcement last spring, and nobody at the Capitol made much of a fuss.

Unions and advocates for day laborers came up with the idea, but even the Illinois Chamber of Commerce was on board. The legislation they supported would bar Illinois businesses from using a federal database called E-Verify to check the legal status of new hires, unless the feds showed the database was at least 99 percent accurate.

Backers of the bill said the database couldn't be trusted. They pointed to the March 2006 firing of Fernando Tinoco, just four days after he started work at a Chicago meatpacking plant, because of bad information his employer got from the federal government. The database flagged Tinoco as a possible illegal worker, even though he had become a U.S. citizen nearly two decades earlier.

"They've got to clean up their act," state Sen. Iris Martinez, a Chicago Democrat and the measure's Senate sponsor, says of the federal government. "Too many people will lose their jobs if these people don't start being a little more careful with all the information that's being inputted."

On the Senate floor last spring, state Sen. Dale Righter, a Mattoon Republican, urged his colleagues to defeat the measure. The 99 percent threshold made it impossible for the federal government to comply, he explained.

"I appreciate the seriousness of the problem," he added. "I do not believe this is the right way to address it." Righter ended up on the short side of a 42-8 vote; the House already had approved the measure 76-39.

It was an unremarkable debate for a remarkable development: probably the most audacious challenge to federal immigration authority in the country. Instead of embracing the get-tough immigration policies gaining popularity throughout the nation, the Land of Lincoln is headed in the opposite direction.

"Illinois does seem to be at the forefront of the states trying to subvert federal immigration law," says Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington, D.C.-based group advocating stricter immigration controls.

Last year's law, Krikorian says, "was an attempt at undermining the very concept of federal immigration enforcement rather than complaining about the way it works."

Indeed, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security wasted little time to challenge the measure in court after Democratic Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed it. Now, the state and the federal governments are trying to hammer out a compromise to avoid a legal fight.

But even if lawmakers scale back the workplace law, Illinois remains one of the friendliest states for immigrants, legal or unauthorized. It's opened doors to universities and doctors' offices for

children in the country illegally, and it's made a concerted effort to help legal immigrants become citizens since 1995.

Meanwhile, other states are ratcheting up pressure on unauthorized workers by cutting off public benefits, cracking down on employers who hire immigrants illegally and even enlisting police and prison guards to start deporting crime suspects.

"There is a divide along a continuum" among states, says Jonathan Blazer, an attorney for the National Immigration Law Center, an immigrant rights group, "but really it's two camps."

Where immigration is a new phenomenon, the backlash is the greatest, he says. California, New York, Florida and even Texas, all traditional destinations for immigrants, tend to be more welcoming, he says, but states where immigration is a "15-year phenomenon" are cracking down.

That leads to stark contrasts between states, even neighboring ones.

This spring, several state legislatures are working on legislation to punish companies that knowingly hire illegal immigrants and don't use E-Verify, the federal database. Already a new Oklahoma law will expose employers to all sorts of legal trouble unless they sign up for E-Verify. Arizona doesn't even give businesses the option; companies there must use the same database Illinois is trying to bar.

And Illinois made sure, if and when employers can use E-Verify, they'll have

to do so carefully. A related law allows companies to be charged with a human rights violation if they abuse the E-Verify database, such as engaging in racial discrimination or not giving applicants ample time to correct the federal records before firing them. No other state has similar sanctions.

In education, Illinois is one of 10 states that offers graduates of its high schools in-state tuition regardless of their immigration status. North Carolina lawmakers are considering whether to let unauthorized immigrants enroll in community college, which they were banned from doing until late last year.

As Colorado forbids spending on most public benefits for illegal immigrants, Illinois offers insurance to all children, including the undocumented, under its All Kids plan.

The health care benefits are especially significant because undocumented kids are easier to sign up and more expensive for the state to cover, thanks to federal rules. That's true even though they get the same benefits as citizens and legal immigrants.

Blagojevich's signature achievement, the All Kids health insurance program, is actually a combination of several different state-run programs, most of which rely heavily on federal funding.

The federal government won't pay for children here illegally, so states that want to cover them must pick up the whole tab themselves. That means Illinois pays double to almost triple for those children, compared with the ones signed up for Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

Congress also wanted to make certain that illegal immigrants weren't signing up illicitly for Medicaid, so in 2006 it approved stringent new rules requiring recipients to prove their legal status. Usually, that means Medicaid enrollees now have to show a birth certificate, passport or green card; the rules for the state-run program aren't as strict.

But All Kids benefits depend on a family's income, not on its members' immigration status. Poor families can get health benefits for free, while slightly better-off families get a subsidy. Families who have a child with a chronic condition

who might be impossible to insure in the private market can also buy in.

Illinois isn't the only state to let undocumented children get public health benefits, but it's certainly in the minority. Hawaii, Massachusetts, New York, Washington and, to a certain extent, Rhode Island do as well. Republican California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed covering those children as part of a universal health care proposal he announced last year, but that plan died.

The one glaring exception to Illinois' pro-immigrant stance is the fact that illegal immigrants still can't get state authorization to drive, despite more than five years of effort by immigrant groups and Latino lawmakers.

Proponents believe they came very close last spring, when the proposal passed the Illinois House for the first time and only got bottled up in the Senate because of infighting among Senate Democrats.

By contrast, North Carolina, Tennessee, Michigan and Oregon stopped letting unauthorized immigrants drive in the last two years, and Maine could soon join the

Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights



Salvador Cervantes, former organizer of the Pilsen neighborhood community development group, The Resurrection Project, speaks in favor of a proposal to provide undocumented immigrants with driver's certificates. Cervantes is flanked by other community leaders at the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights' event.

list. The states backed off because of concerns about fraud and the trouble of complying with the federal REAL ID law, which all but requires states to beef up the security standards of their driver's licenses.

And there was not nearly the outcry in Illinois as there was in New York when embattled former Democratic Gov. Eliot Spitzer announced his support in September for letting illegal immigrants drive. Even after revising his plan, Spitzer was forced to let the idea drop because of ferocious public opposition.

His proposal even became a hot potato in the presidential race. At a Democratic debate, U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton, a New York Democrat, waffled when asked if she supported her governor's idea. Later, she clarified that she opposed it while her main Democratic rival, U.S. Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois, said he supported it. Of course, his position was already a matter of public record: He had voted for a similar measure in the Illinois Senate.

Several factors could explain why state government in Illinois has adopted such immigrant-friendly policies. They include: a long history of immigration, the diversity of newcomers, complete Democratic control of state government, recent immigrants organizing as a political force and the way the policies have been included as part of efforts with more universal appeal.

The biggest of those, advocates say, is the long history of immigration to Illinois — and Chicago in particular.

"There's segregation in Chicago, no doubt. But at the same time, people work together across race and across immigrant groups. They're more open to people having an accent. They understand how hard it is to learn another language and how that takes time," says Tim Bell, executive director of the Chicago Workers' Collaborative, which advocates on behalf of day laborers in the city and the suburbs.

And Joshua Hoyt, executive director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, notes that the immigrants coming into Illinois are diverse.

Although half of them come from Latin America, roughly a quarter come from Europe and another quarter are from Asia. About 3 percent come from Africa.

Sometimes, tensions have boiled over, as they have when Waukegan and Carpentersville discussed local ordinances trying to crack down on illegal immigration.

As a practical matter, Hoyt explains, that means newcomers from Ireland, the former Soviet Union or Poland connect with communities that are already here, giving them natural allies in the political arena. So it wasn't just Latinos pushing the driver's license bill. Irish groups made their case with Irish-American lawmakers, while African immigrants turned to African-American legislators.

Billy Lawless, head of Celts for Immigration Reform and a Wrigleyville bar owner, was one of those who came to Springfield to support the license measure. He says he's met many undocumented Irish living in Chicago who work in construction and the hospitality industry.

"I got involved purely because of the Irish scene. We all get involved because of our own people, OK?" he says. "We need this labor. ... We need it in the restaurant business, construction, forestry, fisheries, horticulture, you name it."

The new wave of immigrants, though, isn't just settling in the city; it's spreading through the suburbs. Sometimes, tensions have boiled over, as they have when Waukegan and Carpentersville discussed local ordinances trying to crack down on illegal immigration.

Suburban immigrant communities, particularly in northwest Cook County, are getting more involved with elections, according to Hoyt. They're especially effective in swing districts for both the General Assembly and Congress where organized immigrants could tilt an election toward a Democrat or a Republican, Hoyt says.

"What we've been teaching people all across the country is to look at where your numbers are," he says. "Look at

where you have the potential for getting more numbers, like through citizenship. Look at doing it in those places where immigrants are the soccer moms and NASCAR dads, that mythical swing voter."

One group, the upstart Mexicanos for Political Progress, is trying to step up pressure by organizing voters around immigration issues, albeit with little initial success. The group backed a primary challenger to Democratic U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski in February and weighed in on a Carpentersville village board race, losing both.

Juan Salgado, the group's treasurer, spoke mainly of getting involved in congressional and local contests — not Statehouse races. Tellingly, though, the group's first event was a fundraiser for Blagojevich, himself the son of a Serbian immigrant, because of the governor's work on immigrant issues.

Salgado says their election work helped get a meeting with Lipinski on his immigration stances after months of futile efforts. The Mexicanos for Political Progress will become more effective as it increases its ability to cover more territory, insists Salgado, who's also director of the Institute for Latino Progress in Chicago and president of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

If the pro-immigrant forces are modest at a statewide level, the anti-immigrant movement in Illinois is almost nonexistent. That's a stark contrast to states in the Southwest and the South, where people calling for more curbs on illegal immigrants are vocal, organized and effective.

Not everyone's convinced, though, that the only way to win elections in immigrant-heavy areas is with lenient immigration policies.

State Sen. Chris Lauzen, an Aurora Republican, lives in an area where the immigrant population is ballooning. Lauzen notes that Aurora is about 37 percent Hispanic and 11 percent black.

But Lauzen says he still enjoys support from Aurora voters, including Republicans who backed him in his unsuccessful primary bid for a U.S. House seat in February. The people he talks to, he says, think there's a "clear difference" between immigrants here legally and those here illegally.

Lauzen cast the lone dissenting vote when the Senate agreed to let some undocumented college students get in-state tuition, and he disagreed with the E-Verify restrictions, too.

"People say you have to pander to this demographic — this seismic change. I think that is inaccurate," Lauzen says.

In fact, Republicans chose a notoriously hard-line candidate on immigration over Lauzen in the primary to take the seat of former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert. But Democrat Bill Foster, a former Fermilab scientist, will replace Hastert for the rest of the year and will run for a full two-year term in November.

In Springfield, the Democratic leaders are keeping serious talks of crackdowns and benefit cuts off the table. Even under Republican rule in the 1990s, the issue never caught fire in the Capitol.

It's the Democrats' control that prevents Lauzen from getting what he calls his "common sense" immigration-related proposals heard in the Senate, the senator says.

Senate President Emil Jones Jr., a Chicago Democrat, has blocked Lauzen's efforts to have the state study the net costs and benefits of illegal immigration to Illinois. Jones also buried a more ambitious Lauzen proposal that would require proof of citizenship for voting, bar undocumented children from All Kids and prevent state housing money from providing mortgages to illegal immigrants.

The Democrats' dominance of Springfield also explains the Illinois Chamber of Commerce's willingness to support the E-Verify measure.

Jay Shattuck, executive director of the chamber's Employment Law Council,

says businesses reported that errors were "way too high," which caused trouble between management and workers. Shattuck says the chamber figured the legislation would send a clear message to the federal government to improve the system.

But there was also some political calculus at work. The strength of labor with the Democratic majority means business interests have to pick their battles, Shattuck says.

"We've been getting kicked in the teeth pretty regularly from the Democratic-controlled General Assembly and the Democratic governor. So we tried to cut our losses in as many areas as we can," he explains.

Still, immigrant advocates say Illinois government started championing immigrant issues well before Democrats stormed to power in 2003.

For example, former Republican Gov. Jim Edgar opened the Refugee and Immigrant Citizenship Initiative, the first outreach effort of its kind, in 1995, and his Republican successor, Gov. George Ryan, continued the program. It provides courses in English as a second language, civics and U.S. history and has helped more than 100,000 immigrants apply to become citizens.

Blazer, the attorney from the National Immigration Law Center, says the way Illinois politicians presented benefits for immigrants helped ensure their passage. All Kids, for example, was a measure that could include everyone in the state.

"Couching it in universal terms rather than a particular interest group gave it a broader public appeal and made people understand this is not a special right," Blazer says.

Certainly, that's the message of Martinez, the senator who sponsored the E-Verify measure. She says the law protects employees' rights at the workplace. "People want to work, and people that readily can work are being denied. It's a worker's protection issue, it's a worker's rights issue," she says. "It's a human right." □

Daniel C. Vock, a frequent contributor to Illinois Issues, is a reporter for the Washington, D.C.-based Stateline.org.

Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights



Community members listen to a presentation calling for driver's certificates for undocumented residents.

Electronic democracy

Bloggers have become a growing part of the political process, but the jury is still out on how often they actually influence policy

by **Bethany Jaeger**

Readers can't "refresh" this page 20 times a day to see the latest information. And they can't touch an underlined word to skip to another page to read a supporting document, hear an interview or see a photo.

Print media are losing committed readers to the more immediate, interactive and free news bits available from computers or handheld devices.

The multitasking readers who thrive on multimedia have developed a habit of accessing the "blogosphere" — the electronic abyss of personal Web sites — as part of their daily routines.

Weblogs, blogs for short, offer instant gratification, but they come with drawbacks. They can reach unimaginable numbers of people in seconds, although attention can be fleeting. The sites can gather a like-minded following that develops into a grassroots effort, but not all blogs have a regular readership. They allow authors and readers to interact in real time, but a lot of people who participate or interact with blogs are anonymous, potentially compromising their integrity.

Despite the semi-illusory nature of blogs, political insiders and policymakers are taking note.

"I read 'em," says Illinois Rep. Frank Mautino, a Spring Valley Democrat and House floor leader. He also reads the online comments allowed by his local newspapers for the same instant response. "People will blog where they will not sit down and write you a letter.

They will blog where they would be too nervous to actually pick up the phone and talk to you."

It's unclear, however, how often blogs actually influence policy. What is clear is that directly and indirectly, Illinois' political bloggers have become part of the process. They scrutinize the government and the media — and influence the way they interact.

Blogging 101: "Blog" is a noun and a verb. Writers blog. Readers comment. They also click on "hypertext" words that take them to other Web pages and endless links to related resources.

They offer a barometer of opinions held by the typical readers, who are diverse, young and middle-aged professionals in nearly equal numbers of males and females, according to the Pew Research Center's report of the Internet & American Life Project. Nationwide, more than 12 million Americans wrote blogs and more than 57 million Americans read them in 2006, the most recent numbers available.

Whether it's Jane Doe writing a stream-of-consciousness diary in her pajamas or presidential campaign staffers writing minute-by-minute updates during national debates, readers interested in a topic can become almost addicted to looking for updates numerous times a day.

In Illinois, a hefty list of self-acclaimed political junkies write their own blogs.

One of the most read is Rich Miller's The Capitol Fax Blog, based in Springfield. The site has a near religious

following from a variety of readers, from corporate executives to union leaders, who want to know the latest news in state government and politics.

"I always joke that it's just out of control," Miller says. "That blog, it's like my own little CNN. People are just on it all the time, especially during campaigns and interesting times during the legislative session. They're just constantly refreshing their screens."

He started his blog in 2004 and has had a Web site since the 1990s. He also publishes an actual facsimile, Capitol Fax.

"When I started out in 1993 with the Capitol Fax, about a third of my subscribers had to buy a fax machine before they could subscribe. You think about how far technology has come."

He maintains Capitol Fax and the blog full time and makes money through advertising and subscriptions, although he won't disclose the amount.

Photograph by Bethany Jaeger



Rich Miller, at left, produces one of the most widely read blogs in Illinois: The Capitol Fax Blog.

Fritchey says more legislators should blog not only because it humanizes them, but because it also allows them to send information to constituents in a way that's more immediate and dynamic than a press release.

Miller also runs another site, a conglomeration of Illinois bloggers called Illinoisize. Many are open about their identities.

At least one is a state legislator.

Rep. John Fritchey, a Chicago Democrat, writes Open House and is featured on Illinoisize. He started his blog a few years ago as a way to share an insider's view of the legislative process. It's become a valuable outlet, but at the same time, it's a risky endeavor.

"A lot of people question why I would do it because politics is a business where anything you say can be twisted to be used against you. I'm now on a very regular basis putting out my thoughts on a number of subjects that are going to stay out there forever. I am conscious of what I write."

That doesn't hinder his candor, including his discontent with Gov. Rod Blagojevich's strained relationship with the legislature. But Fritchey says he writes only to spur thought. "A lot of what I write isn't to make somebody have an opinion, but rather to make them think about an issue."

Blogging for him also has become cathartic. In February, he revealed on the blog that he has Bell's Palsy, causing paralysis on one side of his face.

Fritchey says more legislators should blog not only because it humanizes them, but because it also allows them to send information to constituents in a way that's more immediate and dynamic than a press release.

"People basically have a mini news outlet tailored to their interests," he says. "I think it's going to be increasingly difficult at this day and age to not have some type of Web presence. And I think it will be as commonplace as having town hall meetings."

Although few if any lawmakers other than Fritchey write their own blogs, they definitely read them. Miller declines to share the number of people who look at Capitol Fax Blog, but he says most access the site from computers that have Internet Protocol addresses from the Illinois General Assembly.

"If there's a legislative debate, a lot of legislators are watching the blog while they're debating the thing. And some of them are commenting."

Albeit some of them comment anonymously.

At the same time, readers who watch real-time video of House or Senate floor debate post comments for all to see.

Comments can be troublesome when random readers post off-the-wall rants or attack each other or get carried away with rumors. Miller bans a list of words and even some commenters from appearing on the site.

On the other hand, commenters also can contribute to intelligent debate.

In a February "Question of the Day" feature, Miller asked his readers to consider a state constitutional amendment proposed by Rep. Lou Lang, a Skokie Democrat, that would lower the voting age in Illinois to 17. Fifty-four comments were posted, among them from people calling themselves "Wordslinger," "Dan S, a Voter," "VanillaMan," "Six Degrees of Separation" and "Liberal Louisa."

Many supported the idea of allowing 17-year-olds and even 16-year-olds to vote, while a few warned of a slippery slope and extended the debate to the legal ages for military service, driver's licenses and alcohol consumption. It also was pointed out later that 17-year-olds would be able to vote in local and state elections but not in national elections, where the voting age is still 18.

Without proof of a correlation, the proposal won approval less than a week later from a House committee and advanced to the full chamber for future debate.

And so goes the ambiguous nature of blogs: They generate lots of buzz but offer little evidence of actually turning online discussion into legislative action.

Other popular sites, including the California-based Daily Kos written by Markos Moulitsas Zúniga, aim to advance liberal Democratic ideals and even lobby for or against policies at the national level.

Political journalists also are entering the fray.

Ben Smith, senior political writer and blogger with national multimedia source Politico.com, spoke from his cell phone while multitasking on the Democratic presidential campaign trail.

He posted until 9 p.m. Sunday, February 24, and started at 9 a.m. the next day and posted nine entries before noon. Some posts attracted as many as 199 comments.

"You're just so directly responsive to your readers," he says. "You write something that's not true or inaccurate or you get something wrong, you're going to be told that immediately in the comment section. There's no room for bull---."

The interactive nature of blogs is what holds so much promise, according to Bill Dennis, a.k.a. Peoria Pundit, who has his own blog and also is featured on Illinoize.

A self-described liberal, he focuses on filling in holes of news stories related to state and local government. He practices what's dubbed "citizen journalism," which he believes is revolutionizing and democratizing media. "In an era in which they buy and sell media organizations like pork bellies, blogging is going to be the savior of the public's right to know."

His day job is to provide over-the-phone technical support for companies that put Internet connections in hotels, and he makes a little money from allowing advertisements on his blog. A former mainstream media journalist, he blogs for a hobby — not to promote his own version of news events but to share his perspective and let readers come up with their own conclusions.

"Bloggers came along, and boom, millions of people, tens of millions of people, have their own printing press and can reach everybody in the world. A guy like me can sit back in my house, sit in front of a computer that I bought used at a recycled computer store, and reach thousands of people every day. How is this not great for democracy? I just don't get the complaints about it."

Journalism professor Eric Meyer at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is one who warns that citizen journalism can have an insidious, even viral effect on public knowledge.

"It'd be like you hired somebody to go around and paint graffiti in restrooms that have messages on it that had some commercial undertone to it."

He teaches graphics and design and online publishing but says blogging may not live up to the hype. Just as the fax machine and desktop publishing were supposed to democratize the media, he says he believes those promises were based more on what people hoped for than on what actually developed.

But, he adds, political blogs can be

effective when they generate discussion or when journalists read them and write their own stories.

While Meyer questions the life expectancy of blogging, he says there is one ripe opportunity for the medium to affect policy, and that's in political campaigns.

Case in point: the past two presidential races. The Internet has become a significant fundraiser, something championed four years ago by then-Democratic hopeful Howard Dean. His campaign, spearheaded by manager Joe Trippi, raised millions in small, individual donations online, according to Trippi in an interview published in the 2005 book, *blog! how the newest media revolution is changing politics, business and culture* by journalists David Kline and Dan Burstein.

Trippi says in the book that because of their fundraising abilities, blogs can "change the whole country."

The Pew Internet & American Life Project Report isn't as optimistic. Its November 2006 article, "The Internet and Politics: No revolution yet," says while political campaigns raise a significant amount of money online, they typically use it to pay for more traditional campaign methods of advertising, direct mailers and phone calls.

Furthermore, the report says the effect of the Internet on politics is less about the candidate's ability to use the Internet as a campaign tool and more about the grass-roots efforts coordinated through the Internet: "Activists' use of e-mail and Web sites; small donors' contributions online; bloggers' passion to tell stories and debate issues; and amateur video-graphers' quest to record 'gotcha' moments. Perhaps that is the most fitting contribution this technology can endow to democracy."

So the information in the blogosphere is immediate but fleeting, interactive but anonymous, barometric but micro-cosmic. It can serve as a voice for the people, and at the same time can serve as an echo chamber for those who already agree.

In all cases, blogs already have the attention of the policymakers. What those policymakers do with the information remains to be seen. □

Blogging journalists

Internet users who read blogs also can access insider information from political and government reporters. Here are a few examples:

Illinois Issues magazine publishes Illinois Issues Blog that offers general, nonpartisan analysis.

The *Chicago Tribune* maintains 30 different blogs, including the political sites of Eric Zorn's Change of Subject, the Statehouse bureau's Clout Street, and the Washington bureau's The Swamp.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* publishes 20 blogs, including Lynn Sweet's Scoop from Washington.

The *Chicago Reader*, the *Rockford Register Star*, the *Springfield State Journal-Register*, the *Decatur Herald & Review* and the Illinois Channel, to name a few more, also have blogs.

Community is key

Local services for the elderly help bridge the gap between
Medicaid costs and available funding

by Mary Massingale
Photographs by Kristy Hanlon

Jerry Garrison has two sets of wheels — a 1993 Plymouth Voyager van and an electric wheelchair.

One set depends on the other.

“Wherever my van will get me, my chair will get me,” Garrison says.

However, the 62-year-old Springfield resident depended on others for transportation until last summer, when a state program geared toward keeping senior citizens in their homes paid for the \$480 installation of a donated electric lift for her van. She celebrated by going to the Illinois State Fair for the first time in 50 years.

“The way it worked out — it was a blessing from God,” says Garrison, who receives \$560 a month in disability since arthritis, diabetes, emphysema and heart disease forced her to give up her private day care business two years ago. Divorced since 1985, she’s lived in subsidized housing for the elderly for the past two years.

The “blessing” is becoming more commonplace for seniors, as states grapple with rising Medicaid costs for the elderly and an aging population’s unwillingness to settle for traditional long-term care options such as nursing homes. Policymakers say the solution lies in increased funding for home- and community-based services.

“There is no doubt in my mind that in-home services are the future,” says Charles Johnson, director of the Illinois Department on Aging. “It’s just a matter

of what our clients want and what the states want.”

Medicaid, the state-federal health insurance for the poor and disabled, makes up a large portion of every state government’s budget. However, long-term-care spending for the elderly outpaces other Medicaid spending pressures. A November 2006 report by the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured shows all Medicaid long-term care users in fiscal year 2002 — including the elderly, disabled and children — accounted for only 7 percent of the Medicaid population but 52 percent of total Medicaid spending. Elderly enrollees made up 55 percent of long-term care costs.

Further, of the total 1.9 million elderly Medicaid recipients, one-third used long-term care services but accounted for 86 percent of all Medicaid spending on the elderly. Two-thirds of those 1.9 million used institutional services such as nursing homes at an average cost of \$38,780 per enrollee. Meanwhile, costs for seniors using community-based services averaged less than half at \$17,176.

“The states cannot afford to keep on this Medicaid track,” Johnson says.

Both federal and state governments have pushed expansions for home- and community-based services for seniors because it creates a win-win situation. Seniors retain their independence and get to stay in their homes while saving Medicaid dollars.

Debbie Bailey has watched the evolution of the Department on Aging’s Community Care Program for the past 20 years, starting as a homemaker in the program doing housekeeping, laundry, meal preparation, bathing and grooming for eligible seniors. She now oversees all case managers in a four-county area served by Senior Services of Central Illinois in Springfield.

The program has grown beyond its original homemaker services and adult day programs that provide physical therapy and social activities to include emergency home response systems, medical supplies, minor home repairs and modifications such as wheelchair ramps and grab bars.

“It’s becoming more of a customized program,” Bailey says.

Garrison uses the homemaker service two hours a day, three days a week for housekeeping, laundry and some meal preparation. She also uses the emergency medical response system, allowing her to electronically alert authorities if she falls or needs help by merely pushing a button on a cord she wears around her neck.

“I’m not as afraid to be alone now,” Garrison says.

Johnson counts the statewide emergency response initiative as a success, providing electronic alert systems to about 16,500 seniors in the program’s first year and a half — but he says it’s just the beginning of innovations to keep seniors safe in their homes. Global positioning systems, also known as GPS, could be used for private-pay Alzheimer’s



Jerry Garrison received help from a state program geared toward keeping seniors in their homes. The installation of an electric wheelchair lift for her van allows her to not rely on others for transportation.

patients, while laser beam-based home security systems could track seniors as they move about their home.

"The technology will allow us to do so many things we couldn't do even two years ago," Johnson says.

Technology may advance quickly, but will it keep up with the aging population? The oldest of the baby boomers will turn 65 in 2011, launching them into senior citizen status. Census figures show that in 2000, residents age 65 and older made up 12.4 percent of the national population, and 12.1 percent of the Illinois population. By 2030, those percentages are expected to jump to 19.7 percent nationwide and 18 percent statewide.

The baby boomers made their mark on society with rock and roll, Vietnam War protests and sexual freedom, and do not intend to go quietly into old age and the traditional nursing home. Assisted living facilities offer private-pay residents an opportunity to live in apartment settings within easy reach of housekeeping, laundry, dining and some nursing services. However, Medicaid generally does not pay for assisted living facility costs, which averaged \$3,240 a month in 2005. Meanwhile, the skilled care of a nursing home costs an average of more than \$70,000 a year, according to the Kaiser Commission.

Few senior citizens, however, have the means to pay that nursing home bill. The Kaiser Commission found that 65 percent, or two-thirds, of the elderly living

in the community in 2005 would not be able to pay for even one year of nursing home care. The baby boomers may have revolutionized the 20th century, but they apparently share a common foible with the rest of society — denial of the aging process.

"You don't want to know about senior services until you need them," Bailey says.

However, Illinois is forcing itself to look in the mirror. Lawmakers in 2004 crafted and approved legislation intended to overhaul the state's long-term care system. Known as the Older Adult Services Act, the law calls for transforming Illinois' system of senior citizen services from a facility-based model to a community-based model, while respecting the need for the skilled care of nursing homes.

Members of the Older Adult Services Advisory Committee have been meeting since November 2004 to work on implementation of the act. However, committee member Karen Schinker says lack of funding remains an obstacle as the state tries to move toward an "age in place" attitude.

"We've got a long ways to go yet," says Schinker, who also serves as executive director of Senior Services of Central Illinois.

Satisfying all of the political players in Illinois' long-term care system also makes for a bumpy road. The senior citizen advocacy group AARP is pushing for more home- and community-based services, with 83 percent of its Illinois

members stating they want to age in their homes. Members of the nursing home profession, however, remind policymakers that many seniors need their 24-hour, comprehensive skilled care.

"Our industry has consistently supported home- and community-based services as part of the continuum of care," says Robert Hedges, president of the board of the Illinois Health Care Association. "But what we don't support is the diversion of funds from nursing homes."

Hedges says the profession already gets the short end of the financial stick. The current reimbursement rate for a Medicaid patient in Illinois nursing homes stands at \$104 a day, covering 80 percent of the approximate \$130 cost of daily care.

The shortfall has forced nursing homes to look to Medicare and private-pay patients to make up the difference. As the federal health insurance program for people age 65 and older, Medicare only pays for the first 20 days in a nursing home if the patient comes directly from a hospital stay of at least three days. It then may partially pay for the next 80 days if certain criteria are met. Medicare reimbursement is generally higher than Medicaid, averaging \$370 per day, according to Illinois Health Care Association data.

However, 2007 federal data show 64.4 percent of nursing home patients nationwide are on Medicaid, with Illinois tallying 62.5 percent.

"If we weren't cost-shifting to Medicare and private-pay, we couldn't provide care to the Medicaid residents," Hedges says.

Nursing homes also are serving more shorter-stay patients with increased needs because hospitals often discharge surgery patients after only three or four days, Hedges says.

Beverly Collingwood fits into that shorter-stay profile. After undergoing a colostomy in December 2006, Collingwood stayed in a nursing home for about a month to recover. But then she and her two adult children faced a dilemma.

"I didn't need a nursing home, but I couldn't be on my own," Collingwood says.

She gave up her apartment and moved into a small studio apartment in Springfield Supportive Living. The high-rise building is one of 91 supportive living facilities — commonly known as SLFs — across the state, with 56 more facilities awaiting state approval for construction. SLFs are essentially a Medicaid version of assisted living facilities but also accept private-pay residents. Supportive living facilities save on Medicaid dollars because their

reimbursement rate is 60 percent of nursing home rates, while costs are 75 percent, according to Wayne Smallwood of the Springfield-based Affordable Assisted Living Coalition.

The facilities offer meals, housekeeping and laundry service, as well as exercise programs, medication supervision and social activities. Nursing staff made up of certified nurse aides and registered nurses are either on-site or on-call 24 hours a day.

Springfield Supportive Living offers regular outings to sites both in the city and across central Illinois.

"They encourage you to be as independent as you can," Collingwood says.

She spends most of her time in her floor's common area, knitting and watching programs on the big-screen television while listening to the chirps coming from an ornate bird cage. She uses a walker only for safety but quickly navigates the hallways.

On her own since her 1960 divorce, Collingwood worked as a legal secretary for the same firm for 40 years, right up until the day before her surgery. But the

modified independence of the facility suits her current needs.

"I guess I figured I'd go until I went from putting on work clothes to putting on a coffin," she says.

That independent spirit is the focus of the supportive living program, according to Smallwood.

"You can postpone nursing home admission or even eliminate it," he says.

The occupancy rate tallies 95 percent for facilities open a year or more, with 60 percent of residents on Medicaid and the remaining 40 percent paying full costs of about \$3,000 a month, he says. He believes SLFs are key to the growth of home- and community-based services.

"We are the missing piece of the puzzle," Smallwood says.

However, Garrison says she has found the puzzle pieces that work for her in the Department on Aging's programs.

"I can't begin to tell you what a blessing it is to have these services," Garrison says. "Otherwise, I'd be in trouble." □

Mary Massingale is a freelance writer living in Springfield. She is a former Illinois Statehouse reporter.

Nationwide home- and community-based services

SPENDING

1999	\$17.2 billion
2004	\$31.2 billion

81 percent increase

RECIPIENTS

1.9 million
2.7 million

42 percent increase

SOURCE: Kaiser Commission, 2007 report

Illinois Department on Aging's Community Care Program

SPENDING

FY 2002	\$212.8 million
FY 2008	\$376 million

77 percent increase

AVERAGE MONTHLY CASELOAD

FY 2002	38,978
FY 2008	47,600 (projected)

22 percent increase

The program's proposed FY 2009 budget calls for \$465.6 million to serve an average monthly caseload of 49,900 at a cost of \$677 per senior per month. Participants must apply for Medicaid, but the program also serves private-pay clients on an income-based sliding-fee scale.

SOURCE: Illinois Department on Aging, Illinois Auditor General



Jerry Garrison with her homemaker Valerie Salazar.

Breaking the mold

Aaron Schock is a fresh face, but is he the new face of the Illinois Republican Party?

by Patrick O'Brien

Aaron Schock, veteran of five political campaigns by age 26, wears Italian suits by Ermengildo Zegna and drinks Starbucks. He talks about his party's need to make strong appeals to African-American voters, and he walks the walk by going into his area's black churches to sell his message. He carries endorsements of several unions despite being a Republican representing a heavily Democratic legislative district based in Peoria.

Even some of his political opponents seem to admire his political talent.

The Republican nominee for Congress in the 18th District is many things to many people. He may be the new face of a new kind of politics, or he could be another young "change" candidate without the résumé or worldliness for a spot in Washington, D.C. His seven years in Illinois politics suggests to some that the first statement is truer than the second.

Voters in Illinois and throughout the nation seem to crave a change in the way politics are conducted, an approach that goes beyond party lines and addresses the issues. After several years of bickering and gridlock in Springfield and a combative Congress and president in Washington, change is a recurring theme among political candidates.

Schock is well-positioned for what the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. called the "fierce urgency of now," which has voters reconsidering party affiliation and the traditional roles of "left" and "right" in a search for political leaders who can play nice with each other.



State Rep. Aaron Schock on the House floor

His personality-driven "let's work together" message could be a winner for Illinois Republicans. Substitute Gov. Rod Blagojevich's feuding with Democrats in the Illinois General Assembly for President George W. Bush's battling Congress

on the Hill, and Schock may have an edge in being able to transition from one challenging environment to another.

Yet Schock's age, seen as an asset when paired with his personal appeal, has given critics some ammunition when it comes to policy decisions. He will have to resolve some lingering doubts about his readiness for office to continue his quest to climb the political ladder.

Last November he caused some controversy by suggesting that the United States should sell nuclear arms to Taiwan to counter China. The comments were seen by most observers to be at least naïve and possibly dangerous. His two opponents seized on his comments and said the incident showed Schock was too young and inexperienced to understand foreign policy.

State Rep. Bill Black, a Danville Republican and deputy minority leader in his chamber, says Schock's comments were a symptom of his youth, but the good will he built up because of good constituent services helped him survive the incident.

Three months later, the day after the deadly shooting at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Schock made more risky comments. He publicly suggested that if students had been allowed to carry concealed weapons, the outcome could have been different. The comments came a month after he proposed a bill to allow Illinoisans to carry concealed guns.

Schock says he was prompted by a reporter's question linking the two.



State Rep. Aaron Schock of Peoria campaigns for re-election in 2006. This year he's running for Congress.

"I was specifically asked by a reporter whether or not what happened at NIU would change my support of my concealed carry legislation. I answered the question. I respect people who disagree on the issue of concealed carry legislation, but the subject has nothing to do with 'maturity.'"

Schock's Democratic opponent in the 18th District says his comments about Taiwan should be of concern to voters.

Colleen Callahan, a Peoria broadcaster in her first run for office, says Schock's response to the incident, which was to say the Taiwan comments were made in jest, was "equally as troubling" as the comments. Callahan says it highlights her argument that her experience will resonate with voters and that change and experience don't have to be separate: "I don't think you have to choose between the two."

She realizes, however, that she faces an uphill fight to beat Schock, saying it will

take a "Herculean effort" to raise the money needed. But she's confident in her message.

The framing of the Schock/Callahan race is beginning to sound similar to the one for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Comparing his message of bipartisanship and working across the aisle to that of 2008's most-hyped "change" candidate, U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, Schock says his conservative ideology doesn't impact his ability to seek compromise and get results.

"I wouldn't say that in order to be a 'change' candidate that you have to be moderate."

His approach has helped him become a prohibitive favorite for higher office in what will probably be a tough year for Republicans. Schock may be insulated from that potential backlash because the congressional district has long been

represented by highly visible GOP Reps. Robert Michel and Ray LaHood, and he faces a Democratic opponent who may struggle for name recognition.

He's even gained support from some Illinois Democrats in his bid for Congress.

"While we don't see eye-to-eye on everything ideologically, I think he's going to be a tremendous congressman," says state Democratic Rep. Susana Mendoza of Chicago, who was the youngest member of the legislature until Schock. "He'll be a breath of fresh air in Washington."

It remains to be seen whether Schock is more than "the kind of guy you want your daughter to date," as Bill Dennis, a Peoria blogger, describes him. But his history of crossing traditional party demographics may help Illinois Republicans break the party mold.

Schock has established an ability to woo African Americans and other disaffected voters into the fold.

After winning 4 percent of the African-American vote in his district in 2004, he won 39 percent in 2006 with the help of unions, including the Illinois Federation of Teachers, Service Employees International Union and eight others that endorsed him over his Democratic challenger, Bill Spears.

Dennis suggests that Schock can tailor his message to groups other than solid Republicans without pandering for votes. "Aaron doesn't hesitate to massage the message when he's speaking to different groups of people. He doesn't change the message. He just emphasizes different things."

Schock engages in retail politics, the door-to-door, constituent-focused service that includes community meetings and chicken dinners — one of the reasons he's been successful so far. He's taken the focus off any political difference he may have with his legislative district.

"Here is a legislator who drives back home every single night to be in touch with his constituents," Mendoza says of Schock's 75-mile commute each way to and from the state Capitol.

Schock first made a name for himself by winning a spot on the Peoria Public Schools District 150 board. He was a 19-year-old write-in candidate in 2001, after originally being thrown off the ballot.

In a highly organized campaign, Schock says he knocked on 13,000 doors and beat the incumbent by 2,000 votes. He was later elected school board president at age 23.

Mary Spangler, a former colleague of Schock's and current board member, admits she originally opposed his presence on the board. "I actually wrote into the newspaper against him. I was rallying Peoria. We had to have more people interested in this position who aren't this age. It was an important position. I had no idea how mature he was. My joke was, I had no idea he was 45," she says.

Spangler sees Schock's cross-party appeal in the Peoria area, admitting that she knows many Democrats who support him. Disagreements on issues have not prevented her from recognizing his ability to be productive in Springfield. "With Aaron, I see a politician who is about getting things done, not just using rhetoric."

Whether Schock's record in Springfield is one of getting things done is not entirely clear.

Few of Schock's measures made it through the Illinois General Assembly, which is controlled by the opposite party. Schock sponsored 22 pieces of legislation in the past two years. Of those, five became law, including one that set eligibility guidelines for programs for the disabled, another that allows cameras in school buses and a law that allows autistic patients to be eligible for Medicaid services.

Schock also sponsored bills on a variety of issues affecting people in his district, including reforms to No Child Left Behind, offering higher education assistance to single parents and a prescription drug price-finder.

The measures he's advanced primarily focus on local concerns or policies that don't require a lot of heavy debate.

"All were innovative approaches to addressing social needs," he says.

Whether he's successful in passing laws as a member of the minority party is important, in particular, because Republicans will continue to be the minority in Congress after the November election, according to Kent Redfield, professor of political studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Redfield also says Schock's track record

in the 92nd District with traditionally Democratic constituencies gives him credibility when he talks about bipartisanship.

Black, the Danville Republican, says Schock doesn't view the world in ideological terms, a trait that he believes will help a freshman in Congress. "He doesn't regard the center of the aisle as a Berlin Wall. He's focused on results."

Schock may be in for a rude awakening, however, if he makes it to Washington, where he may be frustrated by the slow pace of change.

"When you're one of 435, it's hard to shake things up," Black says.

Shaking things up is exactly what has got Schock this far.

Dennis, admittedly not a big Schock supporter, says Schock's rise to rock-star status is "a combination of good luck and hard work." However, he also praises Schock's knack for connecting with voters.

"No one can out-campaign and out-schmooze Aaron Schock because he listens to people. Even if he doesn't agree with you, you're going to come away being glad he listened."

Good luck can't fully explain Schock's success in politics, though.

Ricca Slone was the incumbent whom Schock, then 23, defeated in an upset race for state representative in 2004.

"As a candidate, I think he's a natural," Slone says. "He's on the order of Barack Obama."

She adds that campaigning against his boyish appeal made her feel as though she was on a job interview while Schock was asking voters for a date.

Schock captured the district by fewer than 300 votes in 2004, even though Slone raised \$200,000 more than he did and had previously run unopposed for four terms, never winning less than 70 percent of the votes in a general election. Schock's campaign benefited by more than \$400,000 from House Minority Leader Tom Cross and other fellow Republicans.

Despite the hard-fought race, Schock and Slone both say the campaign generally was positive.

Schock says his personal philosophy on campaigning is not to go negative, but to focus on his own message and the issues. "I've never run a campaign against my opponent."

"No one can out-campaign and out-schmooze Aaron Schock because he listens to people. Even if he doesn't agree with you, you're going to come away being glad he listened."

Evidence suggests that Schock goes beyond the ritual niceties of politics to connect with fellow legislators.

Lobbyist and former Republican state representative Tom Ryder describes Schock's interaction with the late Democratic Rep. Louvana Jones of Chicago in 2004. Ryder says Jones had supported Schock's opponent and had campaigned hard against him. But shortly after defeating her candidate, Schock approached Jones on the House floor.

"She was so happy at the demeanor and the manner in which he presented himself, very respectfully. She was delighted," Ryder says. Schock and Jones worked closely on a community college housing bill that session.

Despite having a solidly conservative philosophy and voting record on abortion, gun rights, gay marriage and other bread-and-butter conservative issues, Schock won 59 percent of the vote in the 92nd House District in 2006. The election, like his previous efforts, was a testament to his ability as a campaigner, one of his advantages over Callahan in this year's election.

John Morris, one of Schock's opponents in the recent primary for the 18th Congressional District, remembers meeting Schock during his campaign for school board seven years ago. "This is a personality that has been created by our times. But this is also someone with extreme discipline. He's a machine." □

Business school reconsidered

Critics point a damning finger at the nation's great learning institutions of business administration

Essay by James Krohe Jr.

There are few things about which so many Americans agree than the fact that big businesses are not among the world's good guys. A Harris poll late last year found trust levels in major industries — airlines, insurance, oil, drugs — to be 15 percent or less.

A week's reading of the newspaper business pages will remind one why. Mostly anonymous and unaccountable executives cook the books, backdate stock options and set up shell companies to enrich themselves at the expense of shareholders, employees and the public. The real money is no longer in making things people can use but in such dubious contrivances as the leveraged buy-out and the securitized mortgage. Neither aggrieved shareholders or momentarily outraged regulators or executives' own directors have had much effect in reining in their excesses.

Where do corporate managers learn these dark arts? More than a few critics point a damning finger at the nation's great graduate schools of business administration. It is there that our most ambitious and cleverest, if not our best and brightest, learn how to manipulate people and money for profit. A new history, *Higher Aims to Hired Hands: The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfulfilled Promise of Management as a Profession*, seeks to explain how the university-based schools of business turned into seminaries dedicated to the deeper understanding of Mammon.

The story is of some interest to Illinois. Chicago is one of the places where the modern business corporation was born and today is home to some of the nation's largest firms peddling management advice, such as Accenture (the former Andersen Consulting), which is said to be the largest such consulting firm in the world, with revenues approaching \$20 billion a year. What is today known as the human relations school of management had its roots in studies of workers in Western Electric's massive Hawthorne works in Cicero in the 1920s. And Illinois is home to two of the nation's top-rated MBA mills — The University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and the Northwestern Kellogg School — and the founder of one of those went on to become the founding dean at a third top school at Stanford.

As author Rakesh Khurana explains, the invention of the biz school is usually attributed to the rise in the latter 1800s of technologically sophisticated national corporations. These behemoths were so vastly more complex than their family-run predecessors that they needed highly trained specialists to manage them.

That explains the rise of managers as a class, but the rise of the university-level management school owes to other forces. The institutional entrepreneurs who founded the first schools sought to legitimize management itself, and thus cement managers' claims to control the new wealth machines. Khurana, an associate professor at the Harvard Busi-

ness School, explains, "The elite group that championed management's cause wanted it to be perceived as specifically a 'learned profession' [that] encompassed not only science but, even more important, a broad understanding of business's role within the larger enterprise of civilization itself."

High hopes were not limited to Harvard. Willard E. Hotchkiss, the founding dean of the Northwestern University School of Commerce (later the Kellogg School) and the first dean of Stanford Business School, asserted that applying the scientific method to management would not only make business practices more effective but also "harmonize efficiency with considerations of public welfare." Specifically, Hotchkiss said, it would align the interests of capital and labor as well as those of management and society, and thus "go far toward removing the conflict between business and ethics."

The idea that running a business is a learned profession was idealistic to the point of delusion. Khurana quotes a literary and social critic who in a 1924 speech said, "I can imagine a man practicing medicine or law or architecture or engineering out of sheer love for the thing. But I cannot imagine a man's running a business at a loss. It wouldn't be business. A School of Business means a school where you learn to make money."

Which MBAs seem to do, mainly by getting themselves hired at princely pay (a degree from one of the top five will usually win you a \$90K+ starting salary)

by corporations run by people who have MBAs who believe that the degree confers competence.

Transforming the practitioners of accounting and what became known as human resources management — all essential skills, mind — into the equivalent of the clergy or the scholar was always going to take some doing. Management training remains a mishmash of economics, applied mathematics, psychology and sociology. It lacks the depth of medicine or the breadth of learning required of the clergy or the professoriat or the coherence of science. Writing in *The Atlantic* not long ago, professor-turned-businessman Matthew Stewart concluded of the MBA experience that “it involved taking two years out of your life and going deeply into debt, all for the sake of learning how to keep a straight face while using phrases like ‘out-of-the-box thinking,’ ‘win-win situation,’ and ‘core competencies.’”

As for broad understanding, even on campuses in which specialization rules, business students are notorious for being among the narrowest in their interests. They tend to be the least well-read and show the least curiosity about events outside their field. Is it a coincidence that as the MBAs have come to dominate the corporate ranks, we as a society have ceased to pay much attention to what business leaders have to say on topics of social import, when they have anything to say at all?

In this, the founding generation of biz school deans would be disappointed. At the University of Chicago a century ago, Leon C. Marshall envisioned an institution that would simultaneously serve the fields of business, social work and municipal affairs, since each is so affected by the others. The biz school, unhappily, evolved in response to the same kind of narrow careerism that typifies most professional schools, leaving our young biz whizzes with only a dim understanding of the society that ultimately sustains their business.

That’s bad for society but ultimately bad for business, too, in Khurana’s view. “As things stand, there is little sustained discussion among business school faculty and administrators about whether new technologies, the globalization of trade, demographic trends, the growing inequality between rich and poor, and



shifting social norms may be rendering the investor capitalism model unsustainable, if not actually obsolete.”

As for ethics, biz schools would seem to have eliminated the conflict between business and ethics by simply rejecting the idea that ethics have any claim on business conduct. Of late, the better schools have added instruction on ethics, but such seeds fall on stony ground. Students enter a top biz school to do well, not to do good. What they want is not wisdom but (according to surveys that rank biz schools) a high starting salary or access to a career-building network. Biz schools that started out trying to teach students how to lead lives of worth — Harvard’s old creed — must now content themselves with teaching them how to increase their net worth.

Are all biz school grads venal and corrupt? Of course not. Nor can we hold the MBA responsible for all the ills of corporate capitalism, any more than we can hold MDs responsible for the ills of health care or Ph.D.s for those of the research university. What happened to the high ideals of the original university-

based business schools has happened in all corners of the campus. Ideals of service have not survived in any of the professions, even those in which idealism had much deeper roots than it had in business management. Careerism rules, as the old elites have been replaced by people ambitious to become the new elites. However, the biz school has abetted corporate social crimes and misdemeanors by making them respectable.

The biz schools, says Khurana, provided the ideological justification for the overthrow of the old managerialist order that was based on consensus and compromise among shareholders, workers, management and the public. Business is run these days according to the precepts of what the author calls a neoliberal utopianism that values market processes over human concerns. (The pro-market, anti-government Chicago School economists have had enormous influence on future corporate managers through their appointments to the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, and through it on institutions of all kinds.) That’s left business undeniably leaner after the application of nostrums prescribed by the biz schools but also meaner, and the shift is not a little to blame for what some have called the current social recession, with its growing inequality and anxiety among workers of all classes.

So, we come full circle. The times recall those of the late 1800s that gave rise to the biz schools. Then, as now, rapacious corporations strode over the land, corrupting politics, exploiting aggrieved workers and leaving citizens at large appalled by the damage that the untrammelled pursuit of profit had done to their cities and civic values. The difference is, back then the new biz schools hoped to bring civilized values to the running of business, and thus ameliorate its ugly social impacts. Today, the task is to restore civilized values to the biz school to, in Khurana’s words, “rejuvenate intellectually and morally the training of our future business leaders.” □

James Krohe Jr. is a contributing editor at New York-based The Conference Board Review magazine, for which he has written about corporate management and kindred topics since 1978.

SHIFTS AT THE TOP

• Former state Sen. **Carol Ronen**, a Chicago Democrat, resigned from the General Assembly to join Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration as his senior adviser on social services.

Ronen has about 30 years of experience in public administration, starting during the late Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley's administration and then under Mayor Richard M. Daley. She was elected to the Illinois House in 1993 and the Senate in 2000. She chaired the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

She is replaced in the Senate by Chicago Democrat **Heather Steans**, whom Ronen supported in the February Democratic primary to fulfill the remaining two years of her four-year term.

• **Larry O'Brien** is now the governor's acting deputy chief of staff for legislative affairs. He formerly was the governor's liaison to the Illinois Senate. Now he's the liaison to all legislators. He replaces **Joseph Handley**, who became vice president of the Cable Television and Communications Association of Illinois to reopen the Springfield office.

Natural History Survey

Brian Anderson, currently assistant to the president at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield, is set to become chief of the Natural History Survey May 1. He replaces **David Thomas**, who retired after 11 years as chief in late February.

Anderson is the "perfect person" to be the next chief, says **Bill Ruesink**, who's serving as interim chief. "He understands state government, and he understands science, and he knows why the Natural History Survey is important."

Thomas served as director of the Illinois Waste Management and Research Center from 1985 until he joined the Natural History Survey in 1997. Serving on numerous state, national and international boards, he was involved in efforts to address invasive exotic species, to restore the Illinois River, to prevent pollution and to plan sustainable growth. He also chaired the American Fisheries Society committee addressing the 2002 Farm Bill.

Expert in the field



Thomas Jennings

Thomas Jennings, a 30-year veteran of Illinois agriculture, is the new interim director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture. He replaces **Charles "Chuck" Hartke**, a family farmer of Teutopolis and longtime state legislator who served five years as director. He retired.

Jennings, a Springfield native, took the reins shortly after an aging electrical system at the Illinois State Fairgrounds forced the facilities to close and reschedule events until late May.

"Some of the cable is 21 years old," Jennings says. "Some of the cable is 30 years old. It's not about maintenance or lack of maintenance. It is about that system's useful life coming to an end."

The estimate of lost revenue for the state fairgrounds is up to \$150,000, but that excludes the economic impact on Springfield and Sangamon County, he says. The Illinois State Fair is planned to continue as usual in August.

The electrical problem and other inadequacies at the fairgrounds exemplify the need for a statewide capital program, Jennings says, but that requires state lawmakers to agree about financing the program, an ongoing contentious debate.

In the meantime, Jennings expects to continue prioritizing such consumer protection areas as food safety and meat inspections, which include being prepared if disease strikes the state's animal stock. "We have a very important program going in terms of registering premises so that we can do some trace-backs in the event of an animal disease outbreak," he says.

Other duties at the multifaceted agency include protecting against such exotic species as emerald ash borer, regulating pesticides and marketing and promoting Illinois agricultural products.

The biggest challenge this year, however, is coping with the highest grain prices in at least a decade. They trickle down to affect the entire agricultural industry.

"It's all about money," he says. "I don't mean to be glib. It's a tremendous cost of doing business in the grain industry right now."

His experience with the grain industry stretches back to 1978, when he joined the Illinois Department of Agriculture as a grain warehouse examiner.

He later became a claims specialist, adjudicating claims that farmers had against insolvent or bankrupt elevators. He also spent 16 years as the department's chief of the Bureau of Warehouses and advanced to oversee Weights and Measures, Agricultural Products Inspection and the Division of Agriculture Industry Regulation. He became chief of staff before a brief stint as interim director until Hartke was appointed. He served as assistant director until Hartke's retirement.

"It is with mixed emotions that I submitted my resignation to Gov. Blagojevich," Hartke said in a statement. "After a long career in public service, I feel like now is the right time to spend more time with my family."

He served in the Illinois House from 1985 to 2003.

Jennings still farms crops and raises cattle and horses in Sangamon County.

QUOTABLE

“It doesn't matter what letter of the alphabet it is. What was described there doesn't describe me or how I do things.”

Gov. Rod Blagojevich at a news conference covered by the Associated Press at which he reacted to the news that federal Judge Amy St. Eve had confirmed that he is the person prosecutors refer to as "Public Official A" in court filings related to the corruption trial of his fundraiser, Autio "Tony" Rezeko.

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

Democratic takeover

Bill Foster, a Geneva Democrat and Fermilab scientist, snatched the longtime Republican seat in Congress to serve 10 months, the remainder of former U.S. House Speaker **J. Dennis Hastert**'s term. In a special election held March 8, Foster defeated Republican dairy magnate **Jim Oberweis** of Sugar Grove. The two will face off again in November's general election to fill the next two-year term.

Hastert announced his retirement last year after more than 20 years representing the 14th Congressional District, which stretches from Chicago to the state's western border. The Plano Republican also served as state representative from 1981 to 1987.

Foster, who also formerly owned a company that manufactures theater lighting and equipment, favors ending U.S. involvement in the Iraq war, creating an immigrant worker program with tamper-proof identification cards and guaranteeing comprehensive, affordable health care to all, according to his campaign.

This will be Oberweis' fourth run for public office, having competed twice for U.S. Senate and once for Illinois governor.



Bill Foster

Developing choice

The state has a new office intended to help customers gain more choice in which companies supply their energy. **Torsten Clausen** is the new director of the Office of Retail Market Development within the Illinois Commerce Commission, which regulates utilities.

Clausen, a native of northern Germany, manages the Chicago-based office, which was created by statute last year in the midst of a debate about increasing electricity rates that had been frozen for nearly a decade. Although the creation of the office was approved in February 2007, funding didn't come through until state legislative leaders and the governor broke a stalemate and enacted a state budget six months later.

Clausen coordinates efforts to allow competing energy companies to offer electric service to residential and small-business customers in Illinois.

"The desire is there to give customers options to beat high prices, to give customers choice, to not be stuck with just one utility when there's no other game in town," he says.

For customers to have that choice, Clausen must implement another statute that requires existing utilities — Commonwealth Edison for northern Illinois and Ameren Illinois in the rest of the state — to communicate with suppliers that may already be in Illinois but that don't yet serve homes or small businesses. Ameren Illinois spokesman Leigh Morris says the change will allow alternative retail energy suppliers to use an existing billing system.

Coordinating those behind-the-scenes aspects, Clausen's office will complement an effort by the Illinois Power Agency, also created last year as part of the legislature's long-term plan to secure affordable electricity prices. The agency was created to procure the cheapest power possible for all customers, and Clausen says his office will help other suppliers compete to beat that default price.

A pool of suppliers is interested in entering the Illinois market if some of those processes are in place, he adds.

The law specifies the Illinois Commerce Commission may hire up to two staff members, who will work under the director. That hiring process is under way.

Clausen earned his master's degree in economics from the University of Wyoming before joining the Illinois Commerce Commission's Springfield office to work on telecommunications. He later switched to the commission's Chicago office to work on energy-related issues.

Academic all-stars

Two students from the University of Illinois at Chicago joined a select group of undergraduates named to the 2008 All-USA College Academic teams, an annual recognition program of *USA Today*.

UIC senior **Farah Shareef**, a Peoria native who lives in Lombard, is one of 20 students nationwide selected to be on the Academic First Team. Out of nearly 500 people, the chosen team members are honored for outstanding intellectual achievement and leadership beyond the classroom. Each receives \$2,500.

Shareef is a bioengineering major with a math minor who wants to work as a physician-scientist. According to the university, she conducts research at Argonne National Laboratory with Dr. Kenneth Kasza to design a device that paramedics could use to cool cells in the body while heart attack victims are transported to the hospital. She also is co-president of the university's Society for Women Engineers.

Junior **Ying (Amy) Ye** of Lincolnshire was one of 40 additional students honored on the Academic Second and Third teams.

She majors in biological sciences and conducts research on cancer cells. She says she's studying whether Raman spectroscopy can be used to compare malignant and nonmalignant cells. "If there are significant differences, this tool can advance future breakthroughs such as creating a hand-held device that will allow doctors to quickly, efficiently and inexpensively detect presence of tumors," she says.

She previously worked on aromatherapy research at Chicago's Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation.

She skipped third and ninth grades and attended the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora before enrolling as a college freshman at age 15, according to the university.

She plans to go to medical school after graduating next spring.



Write us

Your comments are welcome.
Please keep them brief (250 words).
We reserve the right to excerpt them.

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Limited Edition Hesler prints now available

Alexander Hesler's companion portraits of presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln, taken in Springfield on June 3, 1860, are stunning photographs. Exposed on 8" x 10" light-sensitive glass plates, the images are among the most eloquent and revealing of Illinois' greatest statesman before he left Springfield for Washington.



The Illinois State Historical Society acquired the glass plate positives (the original negatives are in the Smithsonian, damaged beyond repair) and has commissioned archive-quality prints of the Hesler portraits.

In anticipation of the Lincoln Bicentennial in 2009, The Society now offers a limited edition (500) of the 16" x 20" Hesler Lincoln Portraits (shown above), double matted and beautifully framed (choice of natural wood or gilt) with non-glare glass and adorned with a simple brass plate: *A. Lincoln, June 3, 1860*. The photographs are sold only in pairs for \$1,000, plus shipping and applicable sales tax for non-members.

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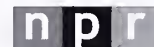
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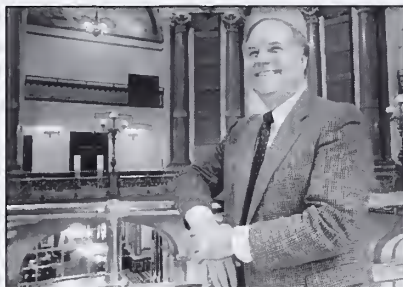
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Charles N. Wheeler III



The grim fact is this state is flat-out broke

by Charles N. Wheeler III

As Illinois lawmakers return from spring break for what everyone fervently hopes will be the last two months of the legislative session, one grim fact overshadows all others: The state is flat-out broke. No, even worse, it's plunged deep in debt, the result of years of living beyond its means.

Consider a smattering of news items that appeared before the General Assembly left Springfield in mid-March:

- All repairs and maintenance for the prison system's automotive fleet now must be cleared through top administrators, rather than performed as needed, because the Department of Corrections owes about \$2 million to the state agency that services state vehicles and doesn't have the money to pay the repair bills.

- Only about half of the 80 beds in a new addition to the LaSalle Veterans Home opening this summer will be available to vets needing nursing care because the state doesn't have the \$3 million needed to staff all the new beds. Meanwhile, more than 500 eligible veterans are on the waiting list for care.

- Poor families in half the counties outside the Chicago area have a difficult time finding dental care, in large part because state health insurance programs pay less than half a dentist's fee, according to dental care advocates.

- Stiff hikes in tuition and fees for students at state colleges are likely under

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the budget Gov. Rod Blagojevich unveiled last month, administrators warned. It would cut operations funding next year for the state's nine public universities.

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State Comptroller Daniel Hynes concurs. Despite "impressive revenue growth" since FY 2003 — roughly a 24 percent gain — the state ended FY 2007 last summer with the worst deficit in the nation for the fourth year in a row, almost \$3.7 billion measured by Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, Hynes reported a few weeks before the governor's address.

In a fiscal state-of-the-state report, Hynes said general funds revenues increased at a rate of \$1.4 billion a year

since 2003. General funds — the state's basic checkbook account — come largely from income and sales taxes and federal reimbursement for spending on health care and social services. Over the last five years, income tax collections grew 35 percent, while sales tax receipts were up 18 percent.

But general funds spending kept pace, especially for health care and K-12 education. Liability for the state Medicaid program grew 28 percent between FY 2003 and FY 2007, to more than \$8 billion. At the same time, the volume of Medicaid bills the state rolled over each year increased to \$3.4 billion in FY 2007, almost double the \$1.8 billion in deferred liabilities in FY 2003. General funds payments to health care providers and other vendors were running almost seven weeks late at the close of 2007, according to the comptroller.

General funds appropriations to the State Board of Education increased 37 percent, or \$1.9 billion, Hynes said, but even so, the state's guaranteed funding level for elementary and secondary education still fell short of the \$6,405 per-student level recommended in 2005. And the state continues to rely too heavily on local property taxes, leading to wide disparities in resources among local school districts, he said.

General funds allocations for public universities, meanwhile, dipped about \$78 million from FY 2003 to FY 2007,

while tuition and fees jumped an average of 65 percent at state schools, significantly affecting “the affordability and accessibility of a college education for Illinois students and their families,” Hynes said.

Perhaps the most ominous note in the symphony of budget woes, though, is the state’s continuing massive pension debt, which stood at more than \$42 billion at the end of FY 2007. Under a 1995 law intended to bring the retirement systems’ assets to 90 percent of liabilities by 2045, the state is required to kick in \$725 million more next year than this year’s \$2.1 billion contribution. Coupled with a projected \$500 million increase in Medicaid liability, the \$1.25 billion-plus increase in those two areas alone is almost double the \$630 million in new general fund revenue legislative forecasters are predicting for FY 2009.

What course should legislators chart to escape the sea of red ink? The obvious choices are to cut spending, to raise revenue or to employ some combination of the two.

Perhaps the most ominous note in the symphony of budget woes, though, is the state’s continuing massive pension debt, which stood at more than \$42 billion at the end of FY 2007.

In his budget address, Blagojevich called for increasing general funds spending by almost \$1.5 billion next year, funded in part by higher casino gambling tax rates and a new payroll tax on businesses, aided by 3 percent cuts in some agency budgets. To help make ends meet, he also trotted out such old standbys as closing business tax “loop-holes,” siphoning money from special funds, leasing the lottery and borrowing to shore up pension accounts.

While the governor’s plans drew only a lukewarm response from legislators, Senate and House committees moved to the floor legislation that would address the state’s financial problems forthrightly by increasing income tax rates to boost school spending, reduce local property taxes and meet other needs.

Conventional wisdom would suggest that a tax hike cannot be passed in an election year, especially when a three-fifths majority would be needed to override an expected Blagojevich veto. But the governor’s most powerful ally, Senate President Emil Jones Jr., is a chief co-sponsor of the Senate measure, and without the approval of House Speaker Michael Madigan, the tax swap proposal would never have emerged from the House Rules Committee. Perhaps the stars are finally aligning for the first step in a long overdue overhaul of the state’s revenue structure. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

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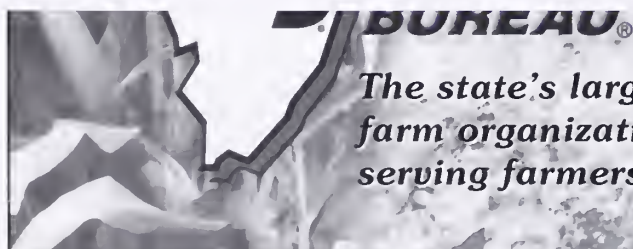
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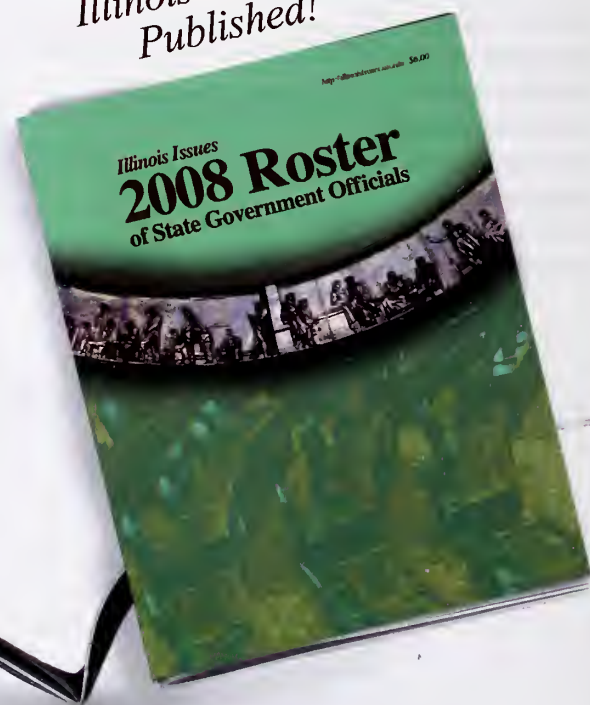
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